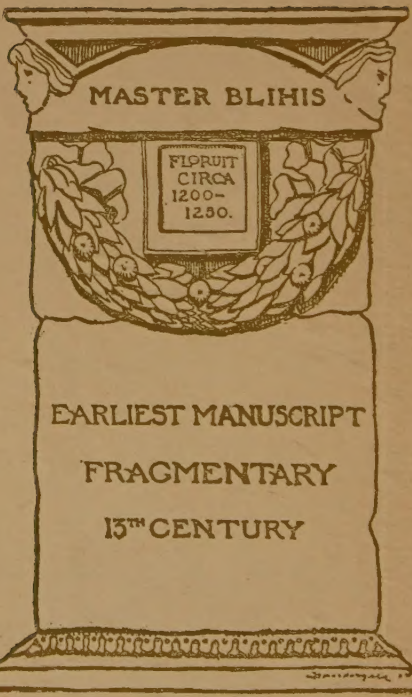
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THE TEMPLE CLASSICS

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THE·HIGH·HISTORY·
OF·THE·HOLY·GRAAL·

THE HIGH HISTORY OF THE HOLY GRAAL

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY SEBASTIAN EVANS

VOL. TWO

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THE HIGH HISTORY OF THE HOLY GRAAL

BRANCH XVI

TITLE I

THIS High History saith that Messire Gawain and Lancelot were repaired to the court of King Arthur from the quest they had achieved. The King made great joy thereof and the Queen. King Arthur sate one day at meat by the side of the Queen, and they had been served of the first meats. Thereupon come two knights all armed, and each bore a dead knight before him, and the knights were still armed as they had been when their bodies were alive. 'Sir,' say the knights, 'This shame and this mischief is yours. In like manner will you lose all your knights betimes and God love you not well enough to give counsel herein forthwith of His mercy.' 'Lords,' saith the King, 'How came these knights to be in so evil case?' 'Sir,' say they, 'It is of good right you ought to know. The Knight of the Fiery Dragon is entered into the head of your land, and is destroying knights and castles and whatsoever he may lay hands on, in such sort that none durst contend against him, for he is taller by a

Evil tidings

The Knight of

foot than any knight ever you had, and of grisly cheer, and so is his sword three times bigger than the sword of ever another knight, and his spear is well as heavy as a man may carry. Two knights might lightly cover them of his shield, and it hath on the outer side the head of a dragon that casteth forth fire and flame whensoever he will, so eager and biting that none may long endure his encounter.

II

'None other, how strong soever he be, may stand against him, and, even as you see, hath he burnt and evil-entreated all other knights that have withstood him.' 'From what land hath come such manner of man?' 'Sir,' say the knights, 'He is come from the Giant's castle, and he warreth upon you for the love of Logrin the Giant, whose head Messire Kay brought you into your court, nor never, saith he, will he have joy until such time as he shall have avenged him on your body or upon the knight that you love best.' 'Our Lord God,' saith the King, 'will defend us from so evil a man.' He is risen from the table, all scared, and maketh carry the two dead knights to be buried, and the others turn back again when they have told their message. The King calleth Messire Gawain and Lancelot and asketh them what he shall do of this knight that is entered into his land? 'By my head, I know not what to say, save you give counsel herein.' 'Sir,' saith Lancelot, 'We will go against him, so please you, I and Messire Gawain between us.' 'By

my head,' saith the King, 'I would not let you go for a kingdom, for such man as is this is no knight but a devil and a fiend that hath issued from the borders of Hell. I say not but that it were great worship and prize to slay and conquer him, but he that should go against him should set his own life in right sore jeopardy and run great hazard of being in as bad plight as these two knights I have seen.' The King was in such dismay that he knew not neither what to say nor to do, and so was all the court likewise in such sort as no knight neither one nor another was minded to go to battle with him, and so remained the court in great dismay. the Fiery Dragon

BRANCH XVII

INCIPIT

Perceval fareth forth

HERE beginneth one of the master branches of the Graal in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

TITLE I

Perceval had been with his mother as long as it pleased him. He hath departed with her good will and the good will of his sister, and telleth them he will return into the land as speedily as he may. He entereth into the great Lonely Forest, and rideth so far on his journeys that he cometh one day at the right hour of noon into a passing fair launde, and seeth a forest. He looketh amidst the launde and seeth a red cross. He looketh to the head of the launde and seeth a right comely knight sitting in the shadow of the forest, and he was clad in white garments and held a vessel of gold in his hand. At the other end of the launde he seeth a damsel likewise sitting, young and gentle and of passing great beauty, and she was clad in a white samite dropped of gold. Josephus telleth us by the divine scripture that out of the forest issued a beast, white as driven snow, and it was bigger than a fox and less than a hare. The beast came into the launde all scared, for she had twelve hounds in her

belly, that quested within like as it were hounds in a wood, and she fled adown the launde for fear of the hounds, the questing whereof she had within her. Perceval rested on the shaft of his spear to look at the marvel of this beast, whereof he had right great pity, so gentle was she of semblance, and of so passing beauty, and by her eyes it might seem that they were two emeralds. She runneth to the knight, all affrighted, and when she hath been there awhile and the hounds rend her again, she runneth to the damsel, but neither there may she stay long time, for the hounds that are within her cease not of their questing, whereof is she sore adread. The Questing Beast

II

She durst not venture herself in the forest. She seeth Perceval and so cometh toward him for protection. She maketh as though she would lie down on his horse's neck, and he holdeth forth his hands to receive her there so as that she might not hurt herself, and evermore the hounds quested. Howbeit the knight crieth out to him, 'Sir Knight, let the beast go and hold her not, for this belongeth neither to you nor to other, but let her dree her weird.' The beast seeth that no protection hath she. She goeth to the cross, and forthwith might the hounds no longer be in her, but issued forth all as it were live hounds, but nought had they of her gentleness nor her beauty. She humbled herself much among them and crouched on the ground and made semblant as though she would have cried them mercy, and gat herself as nigh

Priests that differ

the cross as she might. The hounds had compassed her round about and ran in upon her upon all sides and tore her all to pieces with their teeth, but no power had they to devour her flesh, nor to remove it away from the cross.

III

When the hounds had all to-mangled the beast, they fled away into the wood as had they been raging mad. The knight and the damsel came there where the beast lay in pieces at the cross, and so taketh each his part and setteth the same on their golden vessels, and took the blood that lay upon the earth in like manner as the flesh, and kiss the place, and adore the cross, and then betake them into the forest. Perceval alighteth and setteth him on his knees before the cross and so kisseth and adoreth it, and the place where the beast was slain, in like manner as he had seen the knight and damsel do; and there came to him a smell so sweet of the cross and of the place, such as no sweetness may be compared therewith. He looketh and seeth coming from the forest two priests all afoot; and the first shouteth to him: 'Sir Knight, withdraw yourself away from the cross, for no right have you to come nigh it': Perceval draweth him back, and the priest kneeleth before the cross and adoreth it and boweth down and kisseth it more than a score times, and manifesteth the most joy in the world. And the other priest cometh after, and bringeth a great rod, and setteth the

first priest aside by force, and beateth the cross with the rod in every part, and weepeth right passing sore. The Knight Coward

IV

Perceval beholdeth him with right great wonderment, and saith to him, 'Sir, herein seem you to be no priest! wherefore do you so great shame?' 'Sir,' saith the priest, 'It nought concerneth you of whatsoever we may do, nor nought shall you know thereof for us!' Had he not been a priest, Perceval would have been right wroth with him, but he had no will to do him any hurt. Therewithal he departeth and mounteth his horse and entereth the forest again, all armed, but scarce had he ridden away in such sort or ever he met the Knight Coward, that cried out to him as far as he could see him, 'Sir, for God's sake, take heed to yourself!' 'What manner man are you?' saith Perceval. 'Sir,' saith he, 'My name is the Knight Coward, and I am man of the Damsel of the Car. Wherefore I pray you for God's sake and for your own valour that you touch me not.' Perceval looketh on him and seeth him tall and comely and well-shapen and adroit and all armed upon his horse, so he saith to him, 'Sith that you are so coward, wherefore are you armed thus?' 'Sir,' saith he, 'Against the evil intent of any knight of whom I am adread, for such an one might haply meet me as would slay me forthwith.'

Perceval maketh him

V

'Are you so coward as you say?' saith Perceval. 'Yea,' saith he, 'And much more.' 'By my head,' saith he, 'I will make you hardy. Come now along with me, for sore pity is it that cowardice should harbour in so comely a knight. I am fain that your name be changed speedily, for such name beseemeth no knight.' 'Ha, Sir, for God's sake, mercy! Now know I well that you desire to slay me! No will have I to change neither my courage nor my name!' 'By my head,' saith Perceval, 'Then will you die therefor, betimes!' He maketh him go before him, will he or nill he; and the knight goeth accordingly with right sore grudging. They had scarce ridden away, when he heard in the forest off the way, two damsels that bewailed them right sore, and prayed our Lord God send them succour betimes.

VI

Perceval cometh towards them, he and the knight he driveth before him perforce, and seeth a tall knight all armed that leadeth the damsels all dishevelled, and smiteth them from time to time with a great rod, so that the blood ran down their faces. 'Ha, Sir Knight,' saith Perceval, 'What ask you of these two damsels that you entreat so churlishly?' 'Sir,' saith he, 'They have disherited me of mine own hold in this forest that Messire Gawain gave them.' 'Sir,' say they to Perceval, 'This knight is a

robber, and none other but he now wonneth in this forest, for the other robber-knights were slain by Messire Gawain and Lancelot and another knight that came with them, and, for the sore suffering and poverty that Messire Gawain and Lancelot saw in us aforetime, and in the house of my brother in whose castle they lay, were they fain to give us this hold and the treasure they conquered from the robber-knights, and for this doth he now lead us away to slay and destroy us, and as much would he do for you and all other knights, so only he had the power.' 'Sir Knight,' saith Perceval, 'Let be these damsels, for well I know that they say true, for that I was there when the hold was given them.' 'Then you helped to slay my kindred,' saith the knight, 'And therefore you do I defy!' 'Ha,' saith the Knight Coward to Perceval, 'Take no heed of that he saith, and wax not wroth, but go your way!' 'Certes,' saith Perceval, 'This will I not do: Rather will I help to challenge the honour of the damsels.' be his champion

VII

'Ha, Sir,' saith the Knight Coward, 'Never shall it be challenged of me!' Perceval draweth him back. 'Sir,' saith he, 'See here my champion that I set in my place.' The robber-knight moveth toward him, and smiteth him so sore on the shield that he breaketh his spear, but he might not unseat the Coward Knight, that sate still upright as aforehand in the saddle-bows. He looketh at the other

The Knight Coward

knight that hath drawn his sword. The Knight Coward looketh on the one side and the other, and would fain have fled and he durst. But Perceval crieth to him: 'Knight, do your endeavour to save my honour and your own life and the honour of these two damsels!' And the robber-knight dealeth him a great buffet of his sword so as that it went nigh to stun him altogether. Howbeit the Coward Knight moveth not. Perceval looketh at him in wonderment and thinketh him that he hath set too craven a knight in his place, and now at last knoweth well that he spake truth. The robber-knight smiteth him all over his body and giveth him so many buffets that the knight seeth his own blood. 'By my head,' saith he, 'You have wounded me, but you shall pay therefor, for I supposed not that you were minded to slay me!' He draweth his sword, that was sharp and strong, and smiteth his horse right sore hard of his spurs, and catcheth the knight with his sword right in the midst of his breast with a sweep so strong that he beareth him to the ground beside his horse. He alighteth over him, unlaceth his ventail and smiteth down his coif, then striketh off his head and presenteth it to Perceval. 'Sir,' saith he, 'Here give I you of my first joust.' 'By my head,' said Perceval, 'Right dearly love I this present! Now take heed that you never again fall back into the cowardice wherein you have been. For it is too sore shame to a knight!' 'Sir,' saith he, 'I will not, but never should I have believed that one could become hardy so speedily, or

otherwise long ago would I have become so, and so should I have had worship and honour thereof, for many a knight hath held me in contempt herein, that elsewise would have honoured me.' Perceval answereth that right and reason it is that worshipful men should be more honoured than the other. 'I commend these two damsels to your protection, and lead them to their hold in safety, and be at their pleasure and their will, and so say everywhere that you have for name the Knight Hardy, for more of courtesy hath this name than the other.' 'Sir,' saith he, 'You say true, and you have I to thank for the name.' The damsels give great thanks to Perceval, and take leave of him, and so go their way with right good will toward the knight that goeth with them on account of the knight he had slain, so that thereof called they him the Knight Hardy.

becometh the Knight Hardy

VIII

Perceval departeth from the place where the knight lieth dead, and rideth until that he draweth nigh to Cardoil where King Arthur was, and findeth the country round in sore terror and dismay. Much he marvelleth wherefor it may be, and demandeth of some of the meaner sort wherefore they are in so sore affright. 'Doth the King, then, live no longer?' 'Sir,' say the most part, 'Yea, he is there within in this castle, but never was he so destroyed nor so scared as he is at this present. For a knight warreth upon him

Perceval at the court

against whom no knight in the world may endure.' Perceval rideth on until he cometh before the master hall, and is alighted on the mounting-stage. Lancelot and Messire Gawain come to meet him and make much joy of him, as do the King and Queen and all they of the court; and they made disarm him and do upon him a right rich robe. They that had never seen him before looked upon him right fainly for the worship and valour of his knighthood. The court also was rejoiced because of him, for sore troubled had it been. So as the King sate one day at meat, there came four knights into the hall, and each one of them bore before him a dead knight. And their feet and arms had been stricken off, but their bodies were still all armed, and the habergeons thereon were all black as though they had been blasted of lightning. They laid the knights in the midst of the hall. 'Sir,' say they to the King, 'Once more is made manifest this shame that is done you that is not yet amended. The Knight of the Dragon destroyeth you your land and slayeth your men and cometh as nigh us as he may, and saith that in your court shall never be found knight so hardy as that he durst abide him or assault him.' Right sore shame hath the King of these tidings, and Messire Gawain and Lancelot likewise. Right sorrowful are they of heart for that the King would not allow them to go thither. The four knights turn back again and leave the dead knights in the hall, but the King maketh them be buried with the others.

IX

Damsel of the Bier

A great murmuring ariseth amongst the knights in the hall, and the most part say plainly that they never heard tell of none that slew knights in such cruel sort, nor so many as did he; and that neither Messire Gawain nor Lancelot ought to be blamed for that they went not thither, for no knight in the world might conquer such a man and our Lord God did not, for he casteth forth fire and flame from his shield whensoever him listeth. And while this murmur was going on between the knights all round about the hall, behold you therewithal the Damsel that made bear the knight in the horse-bier and cometh before the King. 'Sir,' saith she, 'I pray and beseech you that you do me right in your court. See, here is Messire Gawain that was at the assembly in the Red Launde where were many knights, and among them was the son of the Widow Lady, that I see sitting beside you. He and Messire Gawain were they that won the most prize of the assembly. This knight had white arms, and they of the assembly said that he had better done than Messire Gawain, for that he had been first in the assembly. It had been granted me, before the assembly began, that he that should do best thereat, should avenge the knight. Sir, I have sought for him until I have now found him at your court. Wherefore I pray and beseech you that you bid him do so much herein as that he be not blamed, for Messire Gawain well knoweth that I have spoken true.

Elinant of Escavalon

But the knight departed so soon from the assembly, that I knew not what had become of him, and Messire Gawain was right heavy for that he had departed, for he was in quest of him, but knew him not.'

X

'Damsel,' saith Messire Gawain, 'Truth it is that he it was that did best at the assembly in the Red Launde, and moreover, please God, well will he fulfil his covenant towards you.' 'Messire Gawain,' saith Perceval, 'Meseemeth you did best above all other.' 'By my faith,' saith Messire Gawain, 'You speak of your courtesy, but howsoever I or other may have done, you had the prize therein by the judgment of the knights. Of so much may I well call upon the damsel to bear witness.' 'Sir,' saith she, 'Gramercy! He ought not to deny me that I require of him. For the knight that I have so long followed about and borne on a bier was son of his uncle Elinant of Escavalon.'

XI

'Damsel,' saith Perceval, 'Take heed that you speak truth. I know well that Elinant of Escavalon was my uncle on my father's side, but of his son know I nought.' 'Sir,' saith she, 'Of his deeds well deserved he to be known, for by his great valour and hardiment came he by his death, and he had to name Alein of Escavalon. The Damsel of the Circlet of Gold loved him of passing great love with all her might. The comeliest knight that

was ever seen of his age was he, and had he lived longer would have been one of the best knights known, and of the great love she had in him made she his body be embalmed when the Knight of the Dragon had slain him, he that is so cruel and maketh desolate all the lands and all the islands. The Damsel of the Circlet of Gold hath he defied in such sort that already hath he slain great part of her knights, and she is held fast in her castle, so that she durst not issue forth, insomuch that all the knights that are there say, and the Lady of the castle also, that he that shall avenge this knight shall have the Circlet of Gold, that never before was she willing to part withal, and the fairest guerdon will that be that any knight may have.

The Knight of the Dragon

XII

'Sir,' saith she, 'Well behoveth you, therefore, to do your best endeavour to avenge your uncle's son, and to win the Circlet of Gold, for, and you slay the knight, you will have saved the land of King Arthur that he threateneth to make desolate, and all the lands that march with his own, for no King hateth he so much as King Arthur on account of the head of the Giant whereof he made such joy at his court.' 'Damsel,' saith Perceval, 'Where is the Knight of the Dragon?' 'Sir,' saith she, 'He is in the isles of the Elephants that wont to be the fairest land and the richest in the world. Now hath he made it all desolate, they say, in such sort that none durst inhabit there, and the

The three best knights

island wherein he abideth is over against the castle of the Damsel of the Golden Circlet, so that every day she seeth him carry knights off bodily from the forest that he slayeth and smiteth limb from limb, whereof hath she right sore grief at heart.'

XIII

Perceval heareth this that the damsel telleth him, and marvelleth much thereat, and taketh thought within himself, sith that the adventure is thus thrown upon him, that great blame will he have thereof and he achieve it not. He taketh leave of the King and Queen, and so goeth his way and departeth from the Court. Messire Gawain departeth and Lancelot with him, and say they will bear him company to the piece of ground, and they may go thither. Perceval holdeth their fellowship right dear. The King and Queen have great pity of Perceval, and say all that never until now no knight went into jeopardy so sore, and that sore loss to the world will it be if there he should die. They send to all the hermits and worshipful men in the forest of Cardoil and bid them pray for Perceval that God defend him from this enemy with whom he goeth forth to do battle. Lancelot and Messire Gawain go with him by the strange forests and by the islands, and found the forests all void and desolate and wasted in place after place. The Damsel followeth them together with the dead knight. And so far have they wandered that they come into the plain country before the forest. So

The Castle of Endeavour

They looked before them and saw a castle that was seated in the plain without the forest, and they saw that it was set in a right fair meadow-land and was surrounded of great running waters and girdled of high walls, and had within great halls with windows. They draw nigh the castle and see that it turneth all about faster than the wind may run, and it had at the top the archers of crossbows of copper that draw their shafts so strong that no armour in the world might avail against the stroke thereof. Together with them were men of copper that turned and sounded their horns so passing loud that the ground all seemed to quake. And under the gateway were lions and bears chained, that roared with so passing great might and fury that all the ground and the valley resounded thereof. The knights draw rein and look at this marvel. 'Lords,' saith the damsel, 'Now may you see the Castle of Great Endeavour. Messire Gawain and Lancelot, draw you back, and come not nigher the archers, for otherwise ye be but dead men. And you, Sir,' saith she to Perceval, 'And you would enter into this castle, lend me your spear and shield, and so will I bear them before for warranty, and you come after me and make such countenance as good knight should, and so shall you pass through into the castle. But your fellows may well draw back, for now is not the hour for them to pass. None may pass thither save only he that goeth to vanquish the knight and win the Golden Circlet and the Graal, and do away the false law with its horns of copper.'

The Turning Castle

XIV

Perceval is right sorrowful when he heareth the damsel say that Messire Gawain and Lancelot may not pass in thither with him albeit they are the best knights in the world. He taketh leave of them full sorrowfully, and they also depart sore grudgingly; but they pray him right sweetly, so Lord God allow him escape alive from the place whither he goeth, that he will meet them again at some time and place, and at ease, in such sort as that they may see him without discognisance. They wait awhile to watch the Good Knight, that hath yielded his shield and spear to the damsel. She hath set his shield on the bier in front, then pointeth out to them of the castle all openly the shield that belonged to the Good Soldier; after that, she maketh sign that it belongeth to the knight that is there waiting behind her. Perceval was without shield in the saddle-bows, and holdeth his sword drawn and planteth him stiffly in the stirrups after such sort as maketh them creak again and his horse's chine swerve awry. After that, he looketh at Lancelot and Messire Gawain. 'Lords,' saith he, 'To the Saviour of the World commend I you.' And they answer, 'May He that endured pain of His body on the Holy True Cross protect him in his body and his soul and his life.' With that he smiteth with his spurs and goeth his way to the castle as fast as his horse may carry him,—toward the Turning Castle. He smiteth with his sword at the gate so

passing strongly that he cut a good three fingers into a shaft of marble. The lions and the beast that were chained to guard the gate slink away into their dens and the castle stoppeth at once. The archers cease to shoot. There were three bridges before the castle that uplifted themselves so soon as he was beyond. **Perceval entereth thereinto**

XV

Lancelot and Messire Gawain departed thence when they had beholden the marvel, but they were fain to go toward the castle when they saw it stop turning. But a knight cried out to them from the battlements, 'Lords, and you come forward, the archers will shoot and the castle will turn, and the bridges be lowered again, wherefore you would be deceived herein.' They draw back, and hear made within the greatest joy that ever was heard, and they hear now the most part therewithin say that now is one come of whom they shall be saved in twofold wise,—saved as of life, and saved as of soul, so God grant him to vanquish the knight that weareth the spirit of the devil. Lancelot and Messire Gawain turn them back thoughtful and all heavy for that they may not pass into the castle, for none other passage might they see than this. So they ride on, until that they draw nigh the Waste City where Lancelot slew the knight. 'Ha,' saith he to Messire Gawain, 'Now is the time at hand that behoveth me to die in this Waste City, and God grant not counsel herein.' He told Messire Gawain all the truth of that which had befallen him therein.

Lancelot is respited

So, even as he would have taken leave of him, behold you, the Poor Knight of the Waste Castle!

XVI

'Sir,' saith he to Lancelot, 'I have taken respite of you in the city within there, of the knight that you slew, until forty days after that the Graal shall be achieved, nor have I issued forth of the castle wherein you harboured you until now, nor should I now have come forth had I not seen you come for fulfilling of your pledge, nor never shall I come forth again until such time as you shall return hither on the day I have named to you. And so, gramercy to you and Messire Gawain for the horses you sent me, that were a right great help to us, and for the treasure and the hold you have given to my sisters that were sore poverty-stricken. But I may not do otherwise than abide in my present poverty until such time as you shall be returned, on the day whereunto I have taken respite for you, sore against the will of your enemies, for the benefits you have done me. Wherefore I pray you forget me not, for the saving of your loyalty.' 'By my head,' saith Lancelot, 'That will I not, and gramercy for having put off the day for love of me.' They depart from the knight and come back again toward Cardoil where King Arthur was.

BRANCH XVIII

TITLE I

HERE the story is silent of Lancelot and Messire Gawain, and saith that Perceval is in the Turning Castle, whereof Joseus recounteth the truth, to wit, that Virgil founded it in the air by his wisdom in such fashion, when the philosophers went on the Quest of the Earthly Paradise, and it was prophesied that the castle should not cease turning until such time as the Knight should come thither that should have a head of gold, the look of a lion, a heart of steel, the navel of a virgin maiden, conditions without wickedness, the valour of a man and faith and belief of God; and that this knight should bear the shield of the Good Soldier that took down the Saviour of the World from hanging on the rood. It was prophesied, moreover, that all they of the castle and all other castles whereof this one was the guardian should hold the old law until such time as the Good Knight should come, by whom their souls should be saved and their death respited. For, so soon as he should be come, they should run to be baptized and should firmly believe the new law. Wherefore was the joy great in the castle for that their death should now be respited, and that they

Virgil his craft

The Island of Elephants

should be released of all terror of the knight that was their foe, whom they dreaded even to the death, and of the sin of the false law whereof they had heretofore been attaint.

II

Right glad is Perceval when he seeth the people of the castle turn them to the holy faith of the Saviour, and the damsel saith to him, 'Sir, right well have you speeded thus far on your way; nought is there now to be done save to finish that which remaineth. For never may they that are within issue forth so long as the Knight of the Dragon is on live. Here may you not tarry, for the longer you tarry, the more lands will be desolate and the more folk will he slay.' Perceval taketh leave of them of the castle, that make much joy of him, but sore misgiving have they of him on account of the knight with whom he goeth to do battle, and they say that if he shall conquer him, never yet befell knight so fair adventure. They have heard mass before that he departeth, and made rich offerings for him in honour of the Saviour and His sweet Mother. The damsel goeth before, for that she knew the place where the evil knight had his repair. They ride until they come into the Island of Elephants. The Knight was alighted under an olive tree, and had but now since slain four knights that were of the castle of the Queen of the Golden Circlet. She was at the windows of her castle and saw her knights dead, whereof made she great dole. 'Ha, God,' saith she, 'Shall I never see none

hat may avenge me of this evil-doer that slayeth ny men and destroyeth my land on this wise?' She looketh up and seeth Perceval come and he damsel. 'Sir Knight, and you have not orce and help and valour in you more than is n four knights, come not nigh this devil! Howbeit, and you feel that you may so do attle as to overcome and vanquish him, I will ive you the Golden Circlet that is within, and will hold with the New Law that hath been of late established. For I see well by your hield that you are a Christian, and, so you may conquer him, then ought I at last to be assured hat your law availeth more than doth ours, nd that God was born of the Virgin.'

The Queen of the Circlet

III

Right joyous is Perceval of this that he heareth her say. He crosseth and blesseth him, and commendeth him to God and His sweet Mother, and is pricked of wrath and hardiment like a lion. He seeth the Knight of the Dragon mounted, and looketh at him in wonderment, for that he was so big that never had he seen any man so big of his body. He seeth the shield at his neck, that was right black and huge and hideous. He seeth the Dragon's head in the midst thereof, that casteth out fire and flame in great plenty, so foul and hideous and horrible that all the field stank thereof. The damsel draweth her toward the castle and leaveth the knight on the horse-bier nigh the plain.

The Knight of the

IV

'Sir,' saith she to Perceval, 'On this level plot was slain your uncle's son whom here I leave, for I have brought him far enough. Now avenge him as best you may, I render and give him over to you, for so much have I done herein as that none hath right to blame me.' With that she departeth. The Knight of the Dragon removeth and seeth Perceval coming all alone, wherefore hath he great scorn of him and deigneth not to take his spear, but rather cometh at him with his drawn sword, that was right long and red as a burning brand. Perceval seeth him coming and goeth against him, spear in rest, as hard as his horse may carry him, thinking to smite him through the breast. But the Knight setteth his shield between, and the flame that issued from the Dragon burnt the shaft thereof even to his hand. And the Knight smiteth him on the top of his helmet, but Perceval covereth him of his shield, whereof had he great affiance that the sword of the foeman knight might not harm it. Josephus witnesseth us that Joseph of Abarimacie had made be sealed in the boss of the shield some of the blood of Our Lord and a piece of His garment.

V

When the Knight seeth that he hath not hurt Perceval's shield, great marvel hath he thereof, for never aforetime had he smitten knight but he had dealt him his death-blow.

He turneth the head of the Dragon toward Perceval's shield, but the flame that issued from the Dragon's head turned back again as had it been blown of the wind, so that it might not come nigh him. The Knight is right wroth thereof, and passeth beyond and cometh to the bier of the dead knight and turneth his shield with the dragon's head against him. He scorcheth and burneth all to ashes the bodies of the knight and the horses. Saith he to Perceval, 'Are you quit as for this knight's burial?' 'Certes,' saith Perceval, 'You say true, and much misliketh me thereof, but please God, I shall amend it.' Burning Dragon

VI

The damsel that had brought the knight was at the windows of the palace beside the Queen. She crieth out. 'Perceval, fair sir,' saith the damsel, 'Now is the shame the greater and the harm the greater, and you amend them not.' Right sorrowful is Perceval of his cousin that is all burnt to a cinder, and he seeth the Knight that beareth the devil with him, but knoweth not how he may do vengeance upon him. He cometh to him sword drawn, and dealeth him a great blow on the shield in such sort that he cleaveth it right to the midst thereof where the dragon's head was, and the flame leapeth forth so burning hot on his sword that it waxed red-hot like as was the Knight's sword. And the damsel crieth to him: 'Now is your sword of the like power as his; now shall it be seen what you will do! I have been

Perceval his victory told of a truth that the Knight may not be vanquished save by one only and at one blow, but how this is I may not tell, whereof irketh me.' Perceval looketh and seeth that his sword is all in a flame of fire, whereof much he marvelleth. He smiteth the Knight so passing sore that he maketh his head stoop down over the fore saddle-bow. The Knight righteth him again, sore wrath that he may not put him to the worse. He smiteth him with his sword a blow so heavy that he cleaveth the habergeon and his right shoulder so as that he cutteth and burneth the flesh to the bone. As he draweth back his blow, Perceval catcheth him and striketh with such passing strength that he smiteth off his hand, sword and all. The Knight gave a great roar, and the Queen was right joyous thereof. The Knight natheless made no semblant that he was yet conquered, but turneth back toward Perceval at a right great gallop and launcheth his flame against his shield, but it availeth him nought, for he might not harm it. Perceval seeth the dragon's head, that was broad and long and horrible, and aimeth with his sword and thrusteth it up to the hilt into his gullet as straight as ever he may, and the head of the dragon hurleth forth a cry so huge that forest and fell resound thereof as far as two leagues Welsh.

VII

The dragon's head turneth it toward his lord in great wrath, and scorcheth him and burneth him to dust, and thereafter departeth

up into the sky like lightning. The Queen cometh to Perceval, and all the knights, and see that he is sore hurt in his right shoulder. And the damsel telleth him that never will he he healed thereof save he setteth thereon of the dust of the knight that is dead. And they lead him up to the castle with right great joy. Then they make him be disarmed, and have his wound washed and tended and some of the knight's dust that was dead set thereon that it might have healing. She maketh send to all the knights of her land: 'Lords,' saith she, 'See here the knight that hath saved my land for me and protected your lives. You know well how it hath been prophesied that the knight with head of gold should come, and that through him should you be saved. And now, behold, hath he come hither. The prophecy may not be belied. I will that you do his commandment.' And they said that so would they do right willingly. She bringeth him there where the Circlet of Gold is, and she herself setteth it on his head. After that, she bringeth his sword and delivereth it unto him, wherewith he had slain the giant devil, both the knight that bare the devil and the devil that the knight bare in his shield.

The Queen is baptized

VIII

'Sir,' saith she, 'May all they that will not go to be baptized, nor accept your New Law, be slain of this your sword, and hereof I make you the gift.' She herself made her be held up and baptized first, and all the other after.

The Castle of Copper

Josephus maketh record that in right baptism she had for name Elysa, and a good life she led and right holy, and she died a virgin. Her body still lieth in the kingdom of Ireland, where she is highly honoured. Perceval was within the castle until that he was heal. The tidings spread throughout the lands that the Knight of the Golden Circlet had slain the Knight of the Dragon, and great everywhere was the joy thereof. It was known at the court of King Arthur, but much marvelled they that it was said the Knight of the Golden Circlet had slain him, for they knew not who was the Knight of the Golden Circlet.

IX

When Perceval was whole, he departed from the castle of the Queen of the Golden Circlet, all of whose land was at his commandment. The Queen told him that she would keep the Golden Circlet until he should will otherwise, and in such sort he left it there, for he would not carry it with him, sith that he knew not whitherward he might turn. The history telleth us that he rode on until one day he came to the Castle of Copper. Within the castle were a number of folk that worshipped the bull of copper and believed not in any other God. The bull of copper was in the midst of the castle upon four columns of copper, and bellowed so loud at all hours of the day that it was heard for a league all round about, and there was an evil spirit within that gave answers concerning whatsoever any should ask of it.

X

Men of copper

At the entrance to the gateway of the castle were two men made of copper by the art of nigromancy, and they held two great mallets of iron, and they busied themselves striking the one after the other, and so strongly they struck that nought mortal is there in the world that might pass through amongst their blows but should be all to-crushed thereby. And on the other side was the castle so fast enclosed about that nought might enter thereinto.

XI

Perceval beholdeth the fortress of the castle, and the entrance that was so perilous, whereof he marvelleth much. He passeth a bridge that was within the entry, and cometh nigh them that guard the gate. A Voice began to cry aloud above the gate that he might go forward safely, and that he need have no care for the men of copper that guarded the gate nor be affrighted of their blows, for no power had they to harm such a knight as was he He comforteth himself much of that the Voice saith to him. He cometh anigh the serjeants of copper, and they cease to strike at once, and hold their iron mallets quite still. And he entereth into the castle, where he findeth within great plenty of folk that all were misbelievers and of feeble belief. He seeth the bull of copper in the midst of the castle right big and horrible, that was surrounded on all sides by folk that all did worship thereunto together round about.

The copper bull

XII

The bull bellowed so passing loud that right uneath was it to hear aught else within the castle besides. Perceval was therewithin, but none was there that spake unto him, for so intent were they upon adoring the bull that, and any had been minded to slay them what time they were yet worshipping the same, they would have allowed him so to do and would have thought that they were saved thereby; and save this had they none other believe in the world. It was not of custom within there to be armed, for the entrance of the fortress was so strong that none might enter but by their will and commandment, save it were the pleasure of our Lord God. And the devil that had deceived them, and in whom they believed, gave them such great abundance therewithin of everything they could desire, that nought in the world was there whereof they lacked. When he perceived that they held no discourse with him, he draweth himself on one side by a great hall, and so called them around him. The more part came thither, but some of them came not. The Voice warneth him that he make them all pass through the entrance of the gateway there where the men with the iron mallets are, for there may he well prove which of them are willing to believe in God and which not. The Good Knight draweth his sword and surroundeth them all and maketh them all go in common before him, would they or nould they. And they that would not go willingly and kindly might be sure

that they should receive their death. He made them pass through the entrance there where the serjeants of copper were striking great blows with their iron mallets. Of one thousand five hundred that there were, scarce but thirteen were not all slain and brained of the iron mallets. But the thirteen had firmly bound their belief in Our Lord, wherefore the serjeants took no heed of them. The River of Hell

XIII

The evil spirit that was in the bull of copper issued forth thereof as it had been lightning from heaven, and the bull of copper melted all in a heap so as that nought remained in that place thereof. Then the thirteen that remained sent for a hermit of the forest and so made themselves be held up and baptized After that, they took the bodies of the misbelievers and made cast them into a water that is called the River of Hell. This water runneth into the sea, so say many that have seen it, and there where it spendeth itself in the sea is it most foul and most horrible, so that scarce may ship pass that is not wrecked.

XIV

Josephus maketh record that the hermit that baptized the thirteen had the name of Denis, and that the castle was named the Castle of the Trial. They lived within there until the New Law was assured and believed in throughout all the kingdoms, and a right good life led they and

King Hermit

a holy. Nor never might none enter with them thereinto but was slain and crushed save he firmly believed in God. When the thirteen that were baptized in the castle issued forth thereof they scattered themselves on every side among strange forests, and made hermitages and buildings, and put their bodies to penance for the false law they had maintained and to win the love of the Saviour of the World.

XV

Perceval, as you may hear, was soldier of Our Lord, and well did God show him how He loved his knighthood, for the Good Knight had much pain and sore travail and pleased Him greatly. He was come one day to the house of King Hermit that much desired to see him, and made much joy of him when he saw him, and rejoiced greatly of his courage. Perceval relateth to him all the greater adventures that have befallen him at many times and in many places sithence that he departed from him, and King Hermit much marvelleth him of many. 'Uncle,' saith Perceval, 'I marvel me much of an adventure that befell me at the outlet of a forest; for I saw a little white beast that I found in the launde of the forest, and twelve hounds had she in her belly, that bayed aloud and quested within her. At last they issued forth of her and slew her beside the cross that was at the outlet of the forest, but they might not eat of her flesh. A knight and a damsel, whereof one was at one end of the launde and

the other at the other, came thither and took the flesh and the blood, and set them in two vessels of gold. And the hounds that were born of her fled away into the forest.' 'Fair nephew,' saith the Hermit, 'I know well that God loveth you sith that such things appear to you, for His valour and yours and for the chastity that is in your body. The beast, that was kindly and gentle and sweet, signifieth Our Lord Jesus Christ, and the twelve dogs that yelped within her signify the people of the Old Law that God created and made in His own likeness, and after that He had made and created them He desired to prove how much they loved Him. He sent them forty years into the wilderness, where their garments never wasted, and sent them manna from heaven that served them whatsoever they would to eat and to drink, and they were without evil and without trouble and without sickness, and such joy and pleasance had they as they would. And they held one day their council, and the master of them said that and God should wax wroth with them and withhold this manna, they would have nought to eat, and that it might not last always albeit that God sent it in so passing great plenty. Wherefore they purposed to set aside great part thereof in store, so that if the Lord God should wax wroth they might take of that which was stored and so save themselves for a long space. They agreed among themselves and did thereafter as they had purposed and determined amongst them.

King Hermit preacheth

Of the Jews

XVI

'God, that seeth and knoweth all things, knew well their thought. He withdrew from them the manna from heaven that had come to them in such abundance, and which they had bestowed in caverns underground, thinking to find there the manna they had set aside, but it was changed by the will of God into efts and adders and worms and vermin, and when they saw that they had done evil, they scattered themselves over strange lands. Fair, sweet nephew,' saith the Hermit, 'These twelve hounds that bayed in the beast are the Jews that God had fed, and that were born in the Law that He established, nor never would they believe on Him, nor love Him, but rather crucified Him and tore His Body after the shamefullest sort they might, but in no wise might they destroy His flesh. The knight and damsel that set the pieces of flesh in vessels of gold signify the divinity of the Father, which would not that His flesh should be minished. The hounds fled to the forest and became savage what time they had torn the beast to pieces, so in like manner are the Jews that were and ever shall be savage, subject to them of the New Law henceforth for ever'

XVII

'Fair uncle,' saith Perceval, 'Good right and reason is it that they should have shame and tribulation and evil reward sith that they slew and crucified Him that had created and made them and deigned to be born as a man in their Law. But two priests came after, whereof the

one kissed the cross and worshipped it right heartily and made great joy thereof, and the other did violence thereunto and beat it with a great rod, and wept right sore and made the greatest dole in the world. With this last was I right sore wrath, and willingly would I have run upon him had he not been a priest.' 'Fair nephew,' saith the Hermit, 'He that beat it believed in God equally as well as he that adored, for that the holy flesh of the Saviour of the World was set thereon, that abhorred not the pains of death. One smiled and made great joy for that He redeemed His souls from the pains of hell that would otherwise have been therein for evermore; and for this made he yet greater joy, that he knew He was God and Man everlastingly in His nature, for he that hath not this in remembrance shall never believe aright. Fair nephew, the other priest beat the cross and wept for the passing great anguish and torment and dolour that our Lord God suffered thereon, or so sore was the anguish as might have melted the rock, nor no tongue of man may tell the sorrow He felt upon the cross. And therefore did he beat it and revile it for that He was crucified thereon, even as I might hate a spear or sword wherewith you had been slain. For nought else did he thus, and ever, so often as he remembereth the pain that God suffered thereon, cometh he to the cross in such manner as you saw. Both twain are hermits and dwell in the forest, and he is named Jonas that kissed and adored the cross, and he that beat and reviled it is named Alexis.'

Of the two priests

Of the Fiery Dragon

XVIII

Willingly heareth Perceval this that his uncle telleth and recordeth him. He relateth how he did battle with the devil-knight that bare in his shield the head of a dragon that cast forth fire and flame, and how the dragon burnt up his lord at the last. 'Fair nephew,' saith the Hermit, 'Right glad am I of these tidings that you tell me, for I have been borne on hand that the Knight of the Golden Circlet had slain him.' 'Sir,' saith Perceval, 'It may well be, but never at any time saw I knight so big and horrible.' 'Fair nephew,' saith the Hermit, 'None might overcome him save the Good Knight only, for all true worshipful men behoveth do battle with the Devil, nor never may he be worshipful man that fighteth not against him. And even as the devil withal that was figured on his shield slew and burnt up his master, even so doth one devil torment and molest other in the world to come; and greater evil might not the Knight of the Devil do you than burn the body of your uncle's son that he had killed, as I have heard tell. Power had he over his body, but, please God, not over his soul to burn it.' 'Fair uncle,' saith Perceval, 'I went thither by a Turning Castle, where were archers of copper that shot bolts, and bears and lions chained at the entrance of the gateway. So soon as I drew nigh and smote thereon with my sword the castle stopped still.' 'Fair nephew,' saith King Hermit, 'Nought had the Devil outwardly besides this

castle. It was the entrance to his fortress, nor would they within ever have been converted save you had been there.' 'Sir,' saith he, 'Right sorrowful am I of Messire Gawain and Lancelot, for well I loved their fellowship, and great aid would they have been in my need.' 'Fair nephew, had they been chaste as are you, well might they have entered on account of their good knighthood. For were they not wanton, the two best knights in the world are they. The Great Quest

XIX

'Fair nephew, in the time of your knighthood have you much advanced the Law of the Saviour, for you have destroyed the falsest believe in the world, and this was of them that believed on the bull of copper and the devil that was therein. If this folk had remained, and had failed of you, never would it have been destroyed until the end of the world. Wherefore marvel not that you have travail in serving God, but endure it willingly, for never had worshipful man honour without pains. But now behoveth you achieve another matter. All they of the land of King Fisherman your uncle have abandoned the New Law, and returned to that which God hath forbidden. But the most part do so rather perforce and for fear of the King that hath seized the land, who is my brother and your uncle, than on account of aught else. Wherefore behoveth you set counsel therein, for this thing may not be achieved by any earthly man save by you

The Castle of the Graal

only. For the castle and land should be yours of right, and sore mischief is it when one that cometh of lineage so high and so holy is traitor to God, and disloyal to the world.

XX

'Fair nephew,' saith the good man, 'The castle hath been much strengthened, for there are now nine bridges newly made, and at each bridge are there three knights tall and strong and hardy, whereof hath he much defence, and your uncle is there within that keepeth the castle. But never sithence, none of the knights of King Fisherman nor of his priests have there appeared, nor knoweth any what hath befallen them. The chapel where the most Holy Graal appeared is all emptied of its sacred hallows; the hermits that are by the forest are fain of your coming, for never see they there a knight pass by that believeth in God. And, so you shall have achieved this enterprise, it is a thing whereof shall God be well pleased.'

XXI

'Fair uncle,' saith Perceval, 'Thither will I go, sith that you commend it to me, for no reason is it that he should have the castle that hath entered thereinto. Of better right ought my mother to have it, that was the next-born to King Fisherman, of whose death am I right sorrowful.' 'Fair nephew, you are right! for on your account fell he into languishment, and, had you then gone again, so say many, then would he have been whole, but how this might

have been I know not of a certainty. But me-thinketh our Lord God willed his languishment and death, for had it been His will, you would have made the demand, but He willed otherwise, wherefore ought we to give thanks and praise Him whatsoever He doth, for He hath foreseen of every man that which shall come to him. I have within here a white mule that is very old. Fair nephew, you will take her with you. She will follow you right willingly, and a banner shall you bear, for the power of God and His virtue shall avail more than your own. Seven-and-twenty knights guard the nine bridges, all chosen and of approved great valour, and none ought now to believe that a single knight may vanquish so many, save the miracle of Our Lord and His virtue shall open a way for him. So I pray and beseech you that you have God always in remembrance and His sweet Mother, and, so at any time you be put to the worse of your knighthood, mount upon the mule and take the banner, and your enemies shall forthwith lose their force, for nought confoundeth any enemy so swiftly as doth the virtue and puissance of God. It is a thing well known that you are the Best Knight of the World, but set not affiance in your strength nor in your knighthood as against so many knights, for against them may you not endure.' King Hermit's discourse

XXII

Perceval hearkeneth to his uncle's discourse and his chastening, and layeth fast hold on all that he saith, wherewith is he pleased ful well,

Perceval departeth

for great affiance hath he in his words. 'Fair nephew,' saith the Hermit, 'Two lions are there at the entry of the gateway, whereof the one is red and the other white. Put your trust in the white, for he is on God's side, and look at him whensoever your force shall fail you, and he will look at you likewise in such sort as that straightway you shall know his intent, by the will and pleasure of Our Saviour. Wherefore do according as you shall see that he would, for no intent will he have save good only, and to help you; nor may you not otherwise succeed in winning past the nine bridges that are warded of the twenty-seven knights. And God grant you may win past in such wise that you may save your body and set forward withal the Law of Our Lord that your uncle hath hindered all that he might.'

XXIII

Perceval departeth from the hermitage, and carrieth away the banner, according to his uncle's counsel, and the white mule followeth after. He goeth his way toward the land that was the land of King Fisherman, and findeth a hermit that was issued forth of his hermitage and was going at a great pace through the forest. He abideth so soon as he beholdeth the cross on Perceval's shield. 'Sir,' saith he, 'I well perceive that you are a Christian, of whom not a single one have I seen this long time past. For the King of Castle Mortal is driving us forth of this forest, for he hath

renounced God and His sweet Mother, so that we durst not remain in His defence.' 'By my faith,' saith Perceval, 'But you shall! for God shall lead you forward, and I after. Are there more hermits in this forest?' saith Perceval. 'Yea, Sir, there be twelve here that are waiting for me at a cross yonder before us, and we are minded to go to the kingdom of Logres and put our bodies to penance for God's sake, and to abandon our cells and chapels in this forest for dread of this felon King that hath seized the land, for he willeth that none who believeth in God should here abide.' **Hermits in exile**

XXIV

Perceval is come with the hermit to the cross where the good men had assembled them together, and findeth Joseus, the young man that was King Pelles' son, of whom he maketh right great joy, and he maketh the hermits turn back again with him, saying that he will defend them and make them safe, by God's help, in the kingdom, and prayeth them right sweetly that they make prayer for him to our Lord that He grant him to win back that which of right is his own. He is come forth of the forest and the hermits with him. He draweth nigh to the castle of King Fisherman, and strong was the defence at the entrance thereof. Some of the knights well knew that Perceval would conquer him, for long since had it been prophesied that he who bare such shield should win the Graal of him that sold God for money.

XXV

Another chapel

The knights saw Perceval coming and the company of hermits with him right seemly to behold, and much marvel had they thereof. About a couple of bowshots above the bridge was a chapel fashioned like the one at Camelot, wherein was a sepulchre, and none knew who lay therein. Perceval abideth thereby and his company. He leaneth his shield and spear against the chapel, and maketh fast his horse and mule by the reins. He beholdeth the sepulchre, that was right fair, and forthwith the sepulchre openeth and the joinings fall apart and the stone lifteth up in such wise that a man might see the knight that lay within, of whom came forth a smell of so sweet savour that it seemed to the good men that were looking on that it had been all embalmed. They found a letter which testified that this knight was named Josephus. So soon as the hermits beheld the sepulchre open, they said to Perceval: 'Sir, now at last know we well that you are the Good Knight, the chaste, the holy.' The knights that warded the bridge heard the tidings that the sepulchre had opened at the coming of the knight, whereof were they in the greater dismay, and well understood that it was he that was first at the Graal. The tidings came to the King that held the castle, and he bade his knights not be dismayed for dread of a single knight, for that he would have no force nor power against them, nor might it never befall but that one only of his own knights should be enough to conquer him.

XXVI

The nine bridges

Perceval was armed upon his horse. The hermits make the sign of the cross over him and bless him and commend him to God. And he holdeth his spear in rest and cometh toward the three knights that guard the first bridge. They all set upon him at once and break their spears upon his shield. One of them he smiteth with such force that he maketh him topple over into the river that runneth under the bridge, both him and his horse. Of him was he quit, for the river was wide and deep and swift. The others held out against him a much longer bout with sharp sword-play, but he vanquished them and smote them to pieces, and flung their bodies into the water. They of the second bridge came forward, that were right good knights, and many a tough bout had he of them and many a felon onslaught. Joseus that was his uncle's son was there, and said to the other hermits that right fainly would he go help him, but that he deemed it might be sin, and they bade him take no heed of that, for that great work of mercy would it be to destroy the enemies of Our Lord. He doeth off his grey cape and fettleth him in his frock, and taketh one of them that were doing battle with Perceval and trusseth him on his neck and so flingeth him into the river all armed, and Perceval slayeth the other twain and hurleth them into the river in like manner as the other.

The White Lion

XXVII

By the time he had won the two bridges he was full spent and weary, wherefore he bethinketh him of the lion, the manner whereof his uncle had told him. Then looketh he toward the entrance of the gateway and seeth the white lion, that stood upright on his two hinder feet, for that he was fain to see him. Perceval looketh him full between the two eyes, and understandeth that the lion is minded by the will of God to do him to wit that the knights of the third bridge are so hardy and of such strength that they may not be overcome of a single knight and our Lord God of his holy bounty open not the way, but that he must fain take the mule and carry the banner if he would conquer them. Perceval understandeth the white lion's intent, and giveth God thanks thereof and draweth him back, and Joseus the young man likewise. As soon as they look back, they see that the first bridge is already lifted up behind them.

XXVIII

Perceval cometh to where the white mule was, and she was starred on the forehead with a red cross. He mounteth thereupon, and taketh the banner and holdeth his sword drawn. So soon as the white lion seeth him coming, he unchaineth himself and runneth incontinent to the bridge that was lifted, right amidst the knights, and lowereth it forthwith. The King of Castle Mortal was on the battlements of the greater fortress of the castle, and crieth to the

knights that warded the bridge, 'Lords,' saith he, 'You are the most chosen knights of my land and the hardiest, but no hardiment is it to lift the bridges on account of a single knight whom you durst not abide body to body, whereof meseemeth it great cowardize and not hardiment. But the lion is hardier than you all, that of his hardiment hath lowered the bridge. Wherefore now know I well that had I set him to ward the first bridge, he would have warded it better than these that have allowed themselves to be slain.' The third bridge

XXIX

Thereupon, behold you Perceval come upon his white mule, sword drawn all naked in his fist, and cometh toward them of the third bridge, whereof he smiteth the first so sore that he overthroweth him into the water. Joseus the hermit cometh forward and would fain have seized the other twain, but they cry mercy of Perceval, and say that they will be at his will in all things, and so will believe on God and His sweet Mother and abandon their evil lord. And they of the fourth bridge say likewise. On such condition he alloweth them to live by the counsel of Joseus, and they cast away their arms and yield up the bridges at his will. Perceval thinketh within himself that God's virtue hath right great power, but that knight who hath force and power ought well to approve his prowess for God's sake. For of all that he shall do or suffer for Him, shall God be well pleased. For, were all the world against

Perceval goeth forward

our Lord God, and He should grant to any single one that should be His champion all His power and might, he would conquer them all in one hour of the day. But He willeth that a man should travail for Him, even as He Himself suffered travail for His people.

XXX

Perceval cometh again back and alighteth of the white mule and delivereth the banner to Joseus, and then mounteth again on his destrier and cometh back to them of the fifth bridge, and these defend themselves right stoutly, for that hardy knights are they, and do battle against Perceval full sturdily. Joseus the hermit cometh thither and assaulteth them with passing great lustihood, that had the Lord God not saved him they would have overthrown and slain him. Howbeit, he holdeth the banner and grappleth them when he may lay hold, and grippeth them so strait that they may not help themselves. Perceval slayeth them and crusheth them and maketh them topple over into the water that ran swiftly beneath the bridge. When they of the sixth bridge saw that these were conquered, they cried mercy of Perceval and yielded themselves to him and delivered up their swords to him, and they of the seventh bridge likewise. When the red lion saw that the seventh bridge was won, and that the knights of the two bridges had yielded themselves up to Perceval, he leapt up with such fury that he burst his chain as had he been wood mad. He came to one of the knights and bit him and slew him,

whereof the white lion was full wroth, and runneth upon the other lion and teareth him to pieces with his claws and teeth. **The lion aideth well**

XXXI

Straightway thereafter he raiseth himself up on his two hinder feet and looketh at Perceval, and Perceval at him. Perceval understandeth well the lion's intent, to wit, that they of the last bridge are worse to conquer than the others, and that they may not be conquered at all save by the will of God and by him that is the lion. And the lion warned him that he go not against them with the banner, holy though it were, nor receive them into mercy what surety soever they might make, for that they are traitors, but that he must fain mount upon the white mule, for that she is a beast on God's side, and that Joseus should bring the banner and all the hermits go before, that are worshipful men and of good life, so as to dismay the traitor King, and so shall the end and the conquest of the castle be brought nigh. Of all this the lion made signs to Perceval, for speak he could not. Great affiance hath Perceval in the lion's warning. He alighteth of his destrier and remounteth on the mule, and Joseus holdeth the banner. The company of twelve hermits was there, right seemly and holy. They draw nigh the castle. The knights on the last bridge see Perceval coming towards them and Joseus the hermit holding the banner, by whom they had seen their other fellows wrestled withal and put to the worse.

The three last traitors

XXXII

The virtue of Our Lord and the dignity of the banner and the goodness of the white mule and the holiness of the good hermits that made their orisons to Our Lord so struck the knights that they lost all power over themselves, but treason might not go forth of their hearts, wherefore right heavy were they of their kinsmen that they had seen slain before them. They bethought them that and if by mercy they might escape thence, they would never end until they had slain Perceval. They come to meet him and so cry him mercy passing sweetly in semblance, and say that they will do his will for ever and ever, so only he will let them depart safe and sound. Perceval looketh at the lion to know what he shall do; he seeth that the lion thinketh them traitors and disloyal, and that so they were destroyed and dead the King that was in the castle would have lost his force; and that, so Perceval will run upon them, the lion will help him slay them. Perceval telleth the knights that never will he have mercy upon them, and forthwith runneth upon them, sword drawn, and sorely it misliked him that they defended not themselves, insomuch that he all but left to slay them for that no defence found he in them. But the lion is so far from holding them in the like disdain, that he runneth upon them and biteth and slayeth them, and then casteth forth their limbs and bodies into the water. Perceval alloweth that this is well and seemly, and pleaseth him much

of that he seeth the lion do, nor never before had he seen any beast that he might love and prize so highly as this one. The King slayeth himself

XXXIII

The King of Castle Mortal was on the battlements of the wall, and seeth how his knights are dead, and how the lion helpeth to slay the last. He setteth himself on the highest place of the walls, then lifteth the skirt of his habergeon and holdeth his sword all naked, that was right keen and well-tempered, and so smiteth himself right through the body, and falleth all adown the walls into the water, that was swift and deep, in such sort that Perceval saw him, and all the good hermits likewise, that marvelled much of a King that should slay himself in such manner; but they say according to the judgment of the scripture, that by right of evil man should the end be evil. On such wise was the end of this King of whom I tell you. Josephus relateth us how none ought to marvel that of three brothers, even though they be sons of the same father and mother, one brother should be evil; and the real marvel, saith he, is when one evil corrupteth not the two that are good, for that wickedness is so hard and keen and beguiling, and goodness so kindly and simple and humble. Cain and Abel were brothers-german, yet Cain slew his brother Abel, the one flesh betrayed the other. But great sorrow is it, saith Josephus, when the flesh that ought to be one becometh twain, and the one flesh goeth about by wickedness to deceive and

Perceval winneth the castle

destroy the other. Josephus recordeth us by this evil king that was so traitorous and false and yet was of the lineage of the Good Soldier Joseph of Abarimacie. This Joseph, as the scripture witnesseth, was his uncle, and this evil king was brother-german of King Fisherman, and brother of the good King Pelles that had abandoned his land, in order that he might serve God, and brother of the Widow Lady that was Perceval's mother, the most loyal that was ever in Great Britain. All these lineages were in the service of Our Lord from the beginning of their lives unto the end, save only this evil King that perished so evilly as you have heard.

XXXIV

You have heard how the King that had seized the castle that had been King Fisherman's slew himself in such wise, and how his knights were discomfited. Perceval entered into the castle and the worshipful hermits together with him. It seemed them when they were come within into the master hall, that they heard chant in an inner chapel *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, and right sweet praising of Our Lord. They found the halls right rich and seemly and fairly adorned within. They found the chapel open where the sacred hallows were wont to be. The holy hermits entered therein and made their orisons, and prayed the Saviour of the World that He would swiftly restore to them the most Holy Graal and the sacred hallows that wont to be therewithin whereby they might be comforted.

XXXV

The Graal cometh back

The good men were there within with Perceval, that much loved their company. Josephus witnesseth us that the ancient knights that were of the household of King Fisherman, and the priests and damsels, departed so soon as the King that slew himself had seized the castle, for that they would not be at his court, and the Lord God preserved them from him and made them go into such a place as that they should be in safety. The Saviour of the World well knew that the Good Knight had won the castle by his valour that should have been his own of right, and sent back thither all them that had served King Fisherman. Perceval made right great joy of them when he saw them, and they of him. They seemed well to be a folk that had come from some place where God and His commandments were honoured, and so indeed had they.

XXXVI

The High History witnesseth us that when the conquest of the castle was over, the Saviour of the World was right joyous and well pleased thereof. The Graal presented itself again in the chapel, and the lance whereof the point bleedeth, and the sword wherewith St. John was beheaded that Messire Gawain won, and the other holy relics whereof was right great plenty. For our Lord God loved the place much. The hermits went back to their hermitages in the forest and served Our Lord

King Fisherman his tomb

as they had been wont. Joseus remained with Perceval at the castle as long as it pleased him, but the Good Knight searched out the land there where the New Law had been abandoned and its maintenance neglected. He reft the lives of them that would not maintain it and believe. The country was supported by him and made safe, and the Law of Our Lord exalted by his strength and valour. The priests and knights that repaired to the castle loved Perceval much, for, so far from his goodness minishing in ought, they saw from day to day how his valour and his faith in God increased and multiplied. And he showed them the sepulchre of his uncle King Fisherman in the chapel before the altar. The coffin was rich and the tabernacle costly and loaded of precious stones. And the priests and knights bear witness that as soon as the body was placed in the coffin and they were departed thence, they found on their return that it was covered by the tabernacle all dight as richly as it is now to be seen, nor might they know who had set it there save only the commandment of Our Lord And they say that every night was there a great brightness of light as of candles there, and they knew not whence it should come save of God. Perceval had won the castle by the command of God. The Graal was restored in the holy chapel, and the other hallows as you have heard. The evil believe was done away from the kingdom, and all were assured again in the New Law by the valour of the Good Knight.

BRANCH XIX

TITLE I

NOW is the story silent of Perceval and cometh back to King Arthur, the very matter thereof, like as testifieth the history, that in no place is corrupted and the Latin lie not. King Arthur was at Cardoil on one day of Whitsuntide that was right fair and clear, and many knights were in the hall. The King sate at meat and all the knights about him. The King looketh at the windows of the hall to right and left, and seeth that two sunbeams are shining within that fill the whole hall with light. Thereof he marvelleth much and sendeth without the hall to see what it might be. The messenger cometh back again and saith thereof that two suns appear to be shining, the one in the East and the other in the West. He marvelleth much thereat, and prayeth Our Lord that he may be permitted to know wherefore two suns should appear in such wise. A Voice appeared at one of the windows that said to him: 'King, marvel not hereof that two suns should appear in the sky, for our Lord God hath well the power, and know well that this is for joy of the conquest that the Good Knight hath made that took away the shield from herewithin. He hath won the land that be-

Two suns appear

A damsel with a casket

longed to good King Fisherman from the evil King of Castle Mortal, that did away thence the good believe, and therefore was it that the Graal was hidden. Now God so willeth that you go thither, and that you choose out the best knights of your court, for better pilgrimage may you never make, and what time you shall return hither, your faith shall be doubled and the people of Great Britain shall be better disposed and better taught to maintain the service of the Saviour.'

II

Thereupon the Voice departed, and well pleased was the King of that it had said. He sitteth at meat beside the Queen. Straightway behold you, a damsel that cometh of such beauty as never was greater, and clad right richly, and she beareth a coffer richer than ever you saw, for it was all of fine gold and set with precious stones that sparkled like fire. The coffer is not large. The damsel holdeth it between her hands. When she was alighted she cometh before the King and saluteth him the fairest she may and the Queen likewise. The King returneth her salute. 'Sir,' saith she, 'I am come to your court for that it is the sovran of all other, and so bring I you here this rich vessel that you see as a gift; and it hath within the head of a knight, but none may open the coffer save he alone that slew the knight. Wherefore I pray and beseech you, as you are the best king that liveth, that you first set your hand thereon, and in like manner afterwards

make proof of your knights, and so the crime and the blood-feud thereof be brought home to you or to any knight that may be within yonder. I pray you that the knight who shall be able to open the coffer wherein the head of the knight lieth, and who therefore is he that slew him, shall have grace of forty days after that you shall be returned from the Graal.' 'Damsel,' saith the King, 'How shall it be known who the knight was?' 'Sir,' saith she, 'Right eath, for the letters are sealed within that tell his name and the name of him that slew him.' The King granteth the damsel her will in such wise as she had asked of him. He hath received the coffer, then maketh her be set at meat and right richly honoured. **Trial of the casket**

III

When the King had eaten, the damsel cometh before him. 'Sir,' saith she, 'Make your knights be summoned and ready for that which you have granted me, and you yourself first of all.' 'Damsel,' saith the King, 'Right willingly.' He setteth his hand to the coffer, thinking to open it, but it was not right that it should open for him. As he set his hand thereon the coffer sweated through just as had it been sprinkled all over and was wet with water. The King marvelled greatly, and so made Messire Gawain set his hand to it and Lancelot and all those of the court, but he that might open it was not among them. Messire Kay the Seneschal had served at meat. He heard say that the King and all the others had essayed and proved the

Kay boasteth himself

coffer but might not open it. He is come thither, all uncalled for. 'Now, then, Kay,' saith the King, 'I had forgotten you.' 'By my head,' saith Kay, 'You ought not to forget me, for as good knight am I and of as much worth as they that you have called before me, and you ought not to have delayed to send for me. You have summoned all the others, and me not a whit, and yet am I as well able, or ought to be, to open the coffer as are they; for against as many knights have I defended me as they, and as many have I slain in defending my body as have they.' 'Kay,' saith the King, 'shall you be so merry and you may open the coffer, and if you have slain the knight whose head lieth therein? By my head, I that am King would fain that the coffer should not open for me, for never was no knight so poor as that he should have neither kinsman nor friend, for he is not loved of all the world that is hated by one man.' 'By my head,' saith Kay, 'I would that all the heads of all the knights I have slain, save one only, were in the midst of this hall, and that there were letters sealed with them to say that they were slain by me. Then would you believe what you are not willing to believe for the envious ones that think they are better worth than I, and yet have not served you so well.'

IV

'Kay,' saith the King, 'Come forward, there is no need of this.' Messire Kay the Seneschal cometh to the dais before the King, whereon was the coffer, and taketh it right

boldly and setteth one of his hands below it and the other above. The coffer opened as soon as he clapped hand thereon, and the head within could be seen all openly. A passing delicate-savoured smell and right sweet issued therefrom, so that not a knight in the hall but smelt it. 'Sir,' saith Kay to the King, 'Now may you know that some prowess and some hardiment have I done in your service, nor might none of your knights that you prize so highly open the coffer this day, nor would you have known this day who is therein for them! But now you know it by me, and therefore of so much ought you to be well pleased with me!' **The casket opened**

V

'Sir,' saith the damsel that had brought the coffer, 'Let the letters be read that are within, so shall you know who the knight was and of what lineage, and what was the occasion of his death.' The King sitteth beside the Queen, and biddeth call one of his own chaplains. Then maketh he all the knights in the hall be seated and keep silence, and commandeth the chaplain that he should spell out the letters of gold all openly according as he should find them written. The chaplain looketh at them, and when he had scanned them down, began to sigh. 'Sir,' saith he to the King and Queen, 'hearken to me, and all the other, your knights.

VI

'These letters say that the knight whose head lieth in this vessel was named Lohot, and he

The head of Lohot

was son of King Arthur and Queen Guenievre. He had slain on a day that is past, Logrin the Giant, by his hardiment. Messire Kay the Seneschal was passing by there, and so found Lohot sleeping upon Logrin, for such was his custom that he went to sleep upon the man after that he had slain him. Messire Kay smote off Lohot's head, and so left the head and the body on the piece of ground. He took the head of the Giant and so bore it to the court of King Arthur. He gave the King and Queen and all the barons of the court to understand that he had slain him, but this did he not; rather, that he did was to slay Lohot, according to the writing and the witness of these letters.' When the Queen heareth these letters and this witting of her son that came thus by his death, she falleth in a swoon on the coffer. After that she taketh the head between her two hands, and knew well that it was he by a scar that he had on his face when he was a child. The King himself maketh dole thereof so sore that none may comfort him, for before these tidings he had thought that his son was still on live and that he was the Best Knight in the world, and when the news came to his court that the Knight of the Golden Circlet had slain the Knight of the Dragon, he supposed that it had been Lohot his son, for that none had named Perceval nor Gawain nor Lancelot. And all they of the court are right sorrowful for the death of Lohot, and Messire Kay hath departed, and if the damsel had not respited the day until the fortieth after the King's return, vengeance would

have been taken of Kay or ever he might have turned him thence. For never did no man see greater dole made in the King's court than they of the Table Round made for the youth. King Arthur and the Queen were so stricken of sorrow that none durst call upon them to make cheer. The damsel that brought thither the coffer was well avenged of the shame that Messire Kay the Seneschal had done her on a day that was past, for this thing would not have been known so soon save it had been by her.

Arthur goeth on pilgrimage

VII

When the mourning for the King's son was abated, Lancelot and many others said to him, 'Sir, you know well that God willeth you should go to the castle that was King Fisherman's on pilgrimage to the most Holy Graal, for it is not right to delay a thing that one hath in covenant with God.' 'Lords,' saith the King, 'right willingly will I go, and thereto am I right well disposed.' The King apparelleth himself for the pilgrimage, and saith that Messire Gawain and Lancelot shall go with him, without more knights, and taketh a squire to wait upon his body, and the Queen herself would he have taken thither but for the mourning she made for her son, whereof none might give her any comfort. But or ever the King departed he made the head be brought into the Isle of Avalon, to a chapel of Our Lady that was there, where was a worshipful holy hermit that was well loved of Our Lord.

Kay fleeth to Briant

The King departed from Cardoil and took leave of the Queen and all the knights. Lancelot and Messire Gawain go along with him and a squire that carrieth their arms. Kay the Seneschal was departed from the court for dread of the King and his knights. He durst not abide in the Greater Britain, and so betook him into the Lesser. Briant of the Isles was of great power in these times, a knight of great strength and hardiment, for all Great Britain had had many disputes between him and King Arthur. His land was full strong of castles and forests and right fruitful, and many good knights had he in his land. When he knew that Kay the Seneschal had departed in such sort from the court, and that he had crossed the sea, he sent for him and held him of his household, and said that he would hold him harmless against the King and against all men. When he knew that the King had departed he began to war upon the land and to slay his men and to challenge his castles.

BRANCH XX

TITLE I

THE story saith that King Arthur goeth his way and Lancelot and Messire Gawain with him, and they had ridden so far one day that night came on in a forest and they might find no hold. Messire Gawain marvelled him much that they had ridden the day long without finding neither hold nor hermitage. Night was come and the sky was dark and the forest full of gloom. They knew not whitherward to turn to pass the night. 'Lords,' saith the King, 'Where may we be able to alight to-night?' 'Sir, we know not, for this forest is right wearisome.' They make the squire climb up a tall tree and tell him to look as far as he may to try whether he may espy any hold or house where they may lodge. The squire looketh on all sides, and then telleth them he seeth a fire a long way off as if it were in a waste house, but that he seeth nought there save the fire and the house. 'Take good heed,' saith Lancelot, 'in which quarter it is, so that you may know well how to lead us thither.' He saith that right eath may he lead them. **The pilgrims benighted**

II

With that he cometh down and mounteth again on his hackney, and they go forward a great pace and ride until they espy the fire

A treacherous chamber

and the hold. They pass on over a bridge of wattles, and find the courtyard all deserted and the house from within great and high and hideous. But there was a great fire within whereof the heat might be felt from afar. They alight of their horses, and the squire draweth them on one side amidst the hall, and the knights set them beside the fire all armed. The squire seeth a chamber in the house and entereth thereinto to see if he may find any meat for the horses, but he cometh forth again the swiftest he may and crieth right sweetly on the Mother of the Saviour. They ask him what aileth him, and he saith that he hath found the most treacherous chamber ever he found yet, for he felt there, what with heads and what with hands, more than two hundred men dead, and saith that never yet felt he so sore afeared. Lancelot went into the chamber to see whether he spake true, and felt the men that lay dead, and groped among them from head to head and felt that there was a great heap of them there, and came back and sate at the fire all laughing. The King asketh whether the squire had told truth. Lancelot answereth him yea, and that never yet had he found so many dead men together. 'Methinketh,' saith Messire Gawain, 'Sith that they are dead we have nought to fear of them, but God protect us from the living.'

III

While they were talking thus, behold you a damsel that cometh into the dwelling on foot

and all alone, and she cometh lamenting right grievously. 'Ha, God!' saith she, 'How long a penance is this for me, and when will it come to an end?' She seeth the knights sitting in the midst of the house. 'Fair Lord God,' saith she, 'Is he there within through whom I am to escape from this great dolour?' The knights hearken to her with great wonderment. They look and see her enter within the door, and her kirtle was all torn with thorns and briars in the forest. Her feet were all bleeding for that she was unshod. She had a face of exceeding great beauty. She carried the half of a dead man, and cast it into the chamber with the others. She knew Lancelot again so soon as she saw him. 'Ha, God!' saith she, 'I am quit of my penance! Sir,' saith she, 'Welcome may you be, you and your company!' Lancelot looketh at her in wonderment. 'Damsel,' saith he, 'Are you a thing on God's behalf?' 'Certes, Sir,' saith she, 'Yea! nor be you adread of nought! I am the Damsel of the Castle of Beards, that was wont to deal with knights so passing foully as you have seen. You did away the toll that was levied on the knights that passed by, and you lay in the castle that demanded it of them that passed through the demesne thereof. But you had me in covenant that so the Holy Graal should appear to you, you would come back to me, for otherwise never should I have been willing to let you go. You returned not, for that you saw not the Graal. For the shame that I did to knights was this penance laid upon

The Damsel of the Beards

A foul penance

me in this forest and this manor, to last until such time as you should come. For the cruelty I did them was sore grievous, for never was knight brought to me but I made his nose be cut off or his eyes thrust out, and some were there as you saw that had their feet or their hands stricken off. Now have I paid full dear thereof since, for needs must I carry into this chamber all the knights that are slain in this forest, and within this manor must I cast them according to the custom thereof, alone, without company; and this knight that I carried in but now hath lain so long in the forest that wild beasts have eaten the half of his body. Now am I quit of this foul penance, thanks to God and to you, save only that I must go back when it shall be daylight in like manner as I came here.'

IV

'Damsel,' saith Lancelot, 'Right glad am I that we should have come to lodge the night here within, for love of you, for never saw I damsel that might do so cruel penance.' 'Sir,' saith she, 'You know not yet what it is, but you will know it ere long this night, both you and your fellows, and the Lord God shield you from death and from mischief! Every night cometh a rout of knights that are black and foul and hideous, albeit none knoweth whence they come, and they do battle right sore the one against other, and the stour endureth of a right long while; but one knight that came within yonder by chance, the first night I came

hither, in ke manner as you have come, made a circle round me with his sword, and I sate within it, as soon as I saw them coming, and so had I no dread of them, for I had in remembrance the Saviour of the World and His passing sweet Mother. And you will do the same, and you believe me herein, for these are knights fiends.' Lancelot draweth his sword and maketh a great circle round the house-place, and they were within. The knights' ghosts

V

Thereupon, behold you the knights that come through the forest with such a rushing as it seemed they would rend it all up by the roots. Afterward, they enter into the manor and snatch great blazing firebrands and fling them one at another. They enter into the house battling together, and are keen to fall upon the knights, but they may not. They hurl the firebrands at them from afar, but they are holding their shields and their swords naked. Lancelot maketh semblant as though he would leap towards them, and sore great cowardize it seemeth him not to go against them. 'Sir,' saith the damsel, 'Take heed that you go not forth of the circle, for you will be in sore jeopardy of death, for well you see what evil folk be these.' Lancelot was not minded to hold himself back, but that he would go toward them sword drawn, and they run upon him on all sides, but he defendeth him stoutly and smiteth the burning firebrands so that he maketh red-hot charcoal fly, and thrusteth his sword

A penance ended

amidst their faces. King Arthur and Messire Gawain leap up to help Lancelot and smite upon these evil folk and cut them limb from limb, and they bellow like fiends so that the whole forest resoundeth thereof. And when they fell to the ground, they may no longer endure, but become fiends and ashes, and their bodies and their horses become devils all black in the shape of ravens that come forth of their bodies. They marvel right sore what this may be, and say that such hostel is right grievous.

VI

When they had put them all to the worse, they sate them down again and rested; but scarce were they seated or ever another rout of yet blacker folk came about them, and they bare spears burning and flaming, and many of them carried dead knights that they had slain in the forest, and dropped them in the midst of the house, and then bid the damsel carry and set them with the others. Howbeit, she answereth that she is quit of their commandment and service, nor no longer is forced to do nought for them sith that she hath done her penance. They thrust forward their spears toward the King and the two knights, as though they were come to avenge their companions; but they all three leapt up together and attacked them right stoutly. But this rout was greater and of knights more hideous. They began to press the King and his knights hard, and they might not put them to the worse as they did the others. And while they were thus in the

thickest of the conflict, they heard the stroke of a bell sounding, and forthwith the knight fiends departed and hurried away a great pace. 'Lords,' saith the damsel, 'Had this sound not been heard, scarce might you have endured, for yet another huge rout of this folk was coming in such sort as that none might have withstood them, and this sound have I heard every night, whereby my life hath been saved.' A bell soundeth

VII

Josephus telleth us that as at this time was there no bell neither in Greater Britain nor in Lesser; but folk were called together by a horn, and in many places there were sheets of steel, and in other places clappers of wood. King Arthur marvelled him much of this sound, so clear and sweet was it, and it well seemed him that it came on God's behalf, and right fain was he to see a bell and so he might. They were the night until the morrow in the house, as I tell you. The damsel took leave of them and so departed. As they came forth of the hold, they met three hermits that told them they were going to search for the bodies that were in this manor so that they might bury them in a waste chapel that was hard by, for such knights had lain there as that henceforward the haunting of the evil folk would be stayed in such sort as that they would have no more power to do hurt to any, wherefore they would set therewithin a worshipful hermit that should build up the place in holiness for the service of God. The King

The knight married

was right joyful thereof, and told them that it had been too perilous. They parted from the hermits and entered into a forest, nor was there never a day so long as King Arthur was on pilgrimage, so saith the history, but he heard the sound of one single bell every hour, whereof he was right glad. He bade Messire Gawain and Lancelot that they should everywhere conceal his name, and that they should call him not Lord but Comrade. They yielded him his will, and prayed to Our Lord that He would guide and lead them to such a castle and such a hostel as that they might be lodged honourably therein. They rode on until evening drew nigh, and they found a right fair hold in the forest, whereinto they entered and alighted. The damsel of the hold came to meet them and made them right great cheer, then made them be disarmed, afterward bringeth them right rich robes to wear. She looketh at Lancelot and knoweth him again.

VIII

'Sir,' saith she, 'You had once, on a day that is past, right great pity of me, and saved me my honour, whereof am I in great unhappiness. But better love I to suffer misease in honour, than to have plenty and abundance in shame or reproach, for shame endureth, but sorrow is soon overpassed.' Thereupon behold you the knight of the hold, whither he cometh from shooting in the forest and maketh carry in full great plenty venison of deer and wild boar. He alighted to greet the knights, and began to

laugh when he saw Lancelot. 'By my head,' saith he, 'I know you well. For you disappointed me of the thing I best loved in the world, and made me marry this damsel that never yet had joy of me, nor never shall have.' 'Fair Sir,' saith Lancelot, 'You will do your pleasure therein, for she is yours. Truth it is that I made you marry her, for you were fain to do her a disgrace and a shame in such sort that her kinsfolk would have had shame of her.' 'By my head,' saith the knight, 'the damsel that I loved before loveth you no better hereof, nay, rather, fain would she procure your vexation and your hurt and your shame if she may, and great power hath she in this forest.' 'Sir,' saith Lancelot, 'I have sithence spoken to her and she to me, and so hath she told me her will and her wish.' Thereupon the knight bade the knights take water, and the lady taketh the basins and presenteth water to the knights. 'Avoid, damsel,' saith the King, 'Take it away! Never, please God, shall it befall that we should accept such service from you.' 'By my head,' saith the knight, 'But so must you needs do, for other than she shall not serve you to-night in this matter, or otherwise shall you not eat with me this night there within.'

against his will

IX

Lancelot understandeth that the knight is not overburdened of courtesy, and he seeth the table garnished of good meat, and bethinketh him he will not do well to lose such ease, for misease enough had they the night before.

The knight is a churl

He maketh the King take water of the lady, and the same service did she for all of them. The knight biddeth them be seated. The King would have made the lady sit beside him at the table, but the Knight said that there she should not sit. She goeth to sit among the squires as she was wont to do. The knights are sorry enough thereof, but they durst not gainsay the will of her lord. When they had eaten, the knight said to Lancelot, 'Now may you see what she hath gained of me by your making me take her perforce; nor never, so help me God, so long as I live shall she be honoured otherwise by me, for so have I promised her that I love far more.' 'Sir,' saith Lancelot, 'To my thinking, you do ill herein and a sin, and meseemeth you should have great blame thereof of them that know it, and may your churlishness be your own, for nought thereof take I to myself.'

x

Lancelot telleth the King and Messire Gawain that were he not lodged in his hostel, and had him outside of the hold, he would willingly have set the blood of his body on it but he would have handled him in such sort as that the lady should be maintained in greater honour, either by force or by prayer, in like manner as he did when he made him marry her. They were right well lodged the night and lay in the hold until the morrow, when they departed thence, and rode right busily on their journeys until they came into a very different land, scarce inhabited of

any folk, and found a little castle in a combe. They came thitherward and saw that the enclosure of the castle was fallen down into an abysm, so that none might approach it on that side, but it had a right fair gateway and a door tall and wide whereby one entered. They beheld a chapel that was right fair and rich, and below was a great ancient hall. They saw a priest appear in the midst of the castle, bald and old, that had come forth of the chapel. They are come thither and alighted, and asked the priest what the castle was, and he told them that it was the great Tintagel. 'And how is this ground all caved in about the castle?' 'Sir,' saith the priest, 'I will tell you. Sir,' saith he, 'King Uther Pendragon, that was father of King Arthur, held a great court and summoned all his barons. The King of this castle that then was here was named Gorlois. He went to the court and took his wife with him, that was named Ygerne, and she was the fairest dame in any kingdom. King Uther sought acquaintance of her for her great beauty, and regarded her and honoured her more than all the others of his court. King Gorlois departed thence and made the Queen come back to this castle for the dread that he had of King Uther Pendragon. King Uther was very wroth with him, and commanded him to send back the Queen his wife. King Gorlois said that he would not. Thereupon King Uther Pendragon defied him, and then laid siege about this castle where the Queen was. King Gorlois was gone to seek for succour. King Uther Pendragon

Tintagel the great castle

Merlin his grave

had Merlin with him of whom you have heard tell, that was so crafty. He made him be changed into the semblance of King Gorlois, so that he entered there within by Merlin's art and lay that night with the Queen, and so begat King Arthur in a great hall that was next to the enclosure there where this abysm is. And for this sin hath the ground sunken in on this wise.' He cometh with them toward the chapel that was right fair, and had a right rich sepulchre therein. 'Lords, in this sepulchre was placed the body of Merlin, but never mought it be set inside the chapel, wherefore perforce it remained outside. And know of a very truth that the body lieth not within the sepulchre, for, so soon as it was set therein, it was taken out and snatched away, either on God's behalf or the Enemy's, but which we know not.'

XI

'Sir,' saith King Arthur, 'And what became of King Gorlois!' 'Sir,' saith he, 'The King slew him on the morrow of the night he lay with his wife, and so forthwith espoused Queen Ygerne, and in such manner as I tell you was King Arthur conceived in sin that is now the best King in the world.' King Arthur hath heard this as concerning his birth that he knew not, and is a little shamed thereof and confounded on account of Messire Gawain and Lancelot. He himself marvelleth much thereof, and much it misliketh him that the priest hath said so much. They lay the night in the hold,

and so departed thence on the morrow when they had heard mass. Lancelot and Messire Gawain, that thought they knew the forest, found the land so changed and different that they knew not whither they were become, and such an one as should come into the land that had been King Fisherman's, and he should come again another time within forty days, should not find the castle within a year. Of things changed

XII

Josephus telleth us that the semblances of the islands changed themselves by reason of the divers adventures that by the pleasure of God befell therein, and that the quest of adventures would not have pleased the knights so well and they had not found them so different. For, when they had entered into a forest or an island where they had found any adventure, and they came there another time, they found holds and castles and adventures of another kind, so that their toils and travails might not weary them, and also for that God would that the land should be conformed to the New Law. And they were the knights that had more toil and travail in seeking adventures than all the knights of the world before them, and in holding to that whereof they had made covenant; nor of no court of no king in the world went forth so many good knights as went forth from the court of King Arthur, and but that God loved them so much, never might they have endured such toil and travail as they did from day to day; for without fail, good knights were they, and good

Lancelot his covenant

knights not only to deal hard buffets, but rather in that they were loyal and true, and had faith in the Saviour of the World and His sweet Mother, and therefore dreaded shame and loved honour. King Arthur goeth on his way and Messire Gawain and Lancelot with him, and they pass through many strange countries, and so enter into a great forest. Lancelot called to remembrance the knight that he had slain in the Waste City whither behoved him to go, and knew well that the day whereon he should come was drawing nigh. He told King Arthur as much, and then said, that and he should go not, he would belie his covenant. They rode until they came to a cross where the ways forked. 'Sir,' saith Lancelot, 'Behoveth me go to acquit me of my pledge, and I go in great adventure and peril of death, nor know I whether I may live at all thereafter, for I slew the knight, albeit I was right sorry thereof, but or ever I slew him, I had to swear that I would go set my head in the like jeopardy as he had set his. Now the day draweth nigh that I must go thither, for I am unwilling to fail of my covenant, whereof I should be blamed, and, so God grant me to escape therefrom, I will follow you speedily.' The King embraceth him and kisseth him at parting and Messire Gawain also, and they pray God preserve his body and his life, and that they may see him again ere it be long. Lancelot would willingly have sent salute to the Queen had he durst, for she lay nearer his heart than aught beside, but he would not that the King nor Messire Gawain

should misdeem of the love they might carry to their kinswoman. The love is so rooted in his heart that he may not leave it, into what peril soever he may go; rather, he prayeth God every day as sweetly as he may, that He save the Queen, and that he may deliver his body from this jeopardy. He hath ridden until that he cometh at the hour of noon into the Waste City, and findeth the city empty as it was the first time he was there. The Waste City

XIII

In the city wherein Lancelot had arrived were many waste houses and rich palaces fallen down. He had scarce entered within the city when he heard a great cry and lamentation of dames and damsels, but he knew not on which side it was, and they say: 'Ha, God, how hath the knight betrayed us that slew the knight, inasmuch as he returneth not! This day is the day come that he ought to redeem his pledge! Never again ought any to put trust in knight, for that he cometh not! The others that came hither before him have failed us, and so will he also for dread of death; for he smote off the head of the comeliest knight that was in this kingdom and the best, wherefore ought he also to have his own smitten off, but good heed taketh he to save it if he may!' Thus spake the damsels. Lancelot much marvelled where they might be, for nought could he espy of them, albeit he cometh before the palace, there where he slew the knight. He alighteth, then maketh fast his horse's reins to a ring that was

Lancelot prayeth

fixed in the mounting-stage of marble. Scarce hath he done so, when a knight alighteth, tall and comely and strong and deliver, and he was clad in a short close-fitted jerkin of silk, and held the axe in his hand wherewith Lancelot had smitten off the head of the other knight, and he came sharpening it on a whet-stone to cut the better. Lancelot asketh him, 'What will you do with this axe?' 'By my head,' saith the knight, 'That shall you know in such sort as my brother knew when you cut off his head, so I may speed of my business.' 'How?' saith Lancelot, 'Will you slay me then?' 'That shall you know,' saith he, 'or ever you depart hence. Have you not loyally promised hereof that you would set your head in the same jeopardy as the knight set his, whom you slew without defence? And no otherwise may you depart therefrom. Wherefore now come forward without delay and kneel down and stretch your neck even as my brother did, and so will I smite off your head, and, if you do not this of your own good will, you shall soon find one that shall make you do it perforce, were you twenty knights as good as you are one. But well I know that you have not come hither for this, but only to fulfil your pledge, and that you will raise no contention herein.' Lancelot thinketh to die, and is minded to abide by that he hath in covenant without fail, wherefore he lieth down on the ground as it were on a cross, and crieth mercy of God. He mindeth him of the Queen, and crieth God of mercy and saith, 'Ha, Lady,' saith he, 'Never shall I see

you more! but, might I have seen you yet once again before I die, exceeding great comfort had it been to me, and my soul would have departed from me more at ease. But this, that never shall I see you more, as now it seemeth me, troubleth me more than the death whereby behoveth me to die, for die one must when one hath lived enough long. But faithfully do I promise you that my love shall fail you not yet, and never shall it be but that my soul shall love you in the other world like as my body hath loved you in this, if thus the soul may love!' With that the tears fell from his eyes, nor, never sithence that he was knight, saith the story, had he wept for nought that had befallen him nor for heaviness of heart, but this time and one other. He taketh three blades of grass and so eateth thereof in token of the holy communion, then signeth him of the cross and blesseth him, riseth up, setteth himself on his knees and stretcheth forth his neck. The knight lifteth up the axe. Lancelot heareth the blow coming, boweth his head and the axe misseth him. He saith to him, 'Sir Knight, so did not my brother that you slew; rather, he held his head and neck quite still, and so behoveth you to do!' Two damsels appeared at the palace-windows of passing great beauty, and they knew Lancelot well. So, as the knight was aiming a second blow, one of the damsels crieth to him, 'And you would have my love for evermore, throw down the axe and cry the knight quit! Otherwise have you lost me for ever!' The knight forthwith flingeth

Lancelot loveth well

Lancelot saveth his head

down the axe and falleth at Lancelot's feet and crieth mercy of him as of the most loyal knight in the world. 'But you? Have mercy on me, you! and slay me not!' saith Lancelot, 'For it is of you that I ought to pray mercy!' 'Sir,' saith the knight, 'Of a surety will I not do this! Rather will I help you to my power to save your life against all men, for all you have slain my brother.' The damsels come down from the palace and are come to Lancelot.

XIV

'Sir,' say they to Lancelot, 'Greatly ought we to love you, yea, better than all knights in the world beside. For we are the two damsels, sisters, that you saw so poor at the Waste Castle where you lay in our brother's house. You and Messire Gawain and another knight gave us the treasure and the hold of the robber-knights that you slew; for this city which is waste and the Waste Castle of my brother would never again be peopled of folk, nor should we never have had the land again, save a knight had come hither as loyal as are you. Full a score knights have arrived here by chance in the same manner as you came, and not one of them but hath slain a brother or a kinsman and cut off his head as you did to the knight, and each one promised to return at the day appointed; but all failed of their covenant, for not one of them durst come to the day; and so you had failed us in like manner as the others, we should have lost this city without recovery and the castles that are its appanages.'

XV

Great joy thereof

So the knight and the damsels lead Lancelot into the palace and then make him be disarmed. They hear presently how the greatest joy in the world is being made in many parts of the forest, that was nigh the city. 'Sir,' say the damsels, 'Now may you hear the joy that is made of your coming. These are the burgesses and dwellers in the city that already know the tidings.' Lancelot leaneth at the windows of the hall, and seeth the city peopled of the fairest folk in the world, and great thronging in the broad streets and the great palace, and clerks and priests coming in long procession praising God and blessing Him for that they may now return to their church, and giving benison to the knight through whom they are free to repair thither. Lancelot was much honoured throughout the city. The two damsels are at great pains to wait upon him, and right great worship had he of all them that were therewithin and them that came thither, both clerks and priests.

BRANCH XXI

TITLE I

Assembly of tourney

THEREWITHAL the history is silent of Lancelot, and speaketh word of the King and Messire Gawain, that are in sore misgiving as concerning him, for right gladly would they have heard tidings of him. They met a knight that was coming all armed, and Messire Gawain asketh him whence he came, and he said that he came from the land of the Queen of the Golden Circlet, to whom a sore loss hath befallen; for the Son of the Widow Lady had won the Circlet of Gold for that he had slain the Knight of the Dragon, and she was to keep it safe for him and deliver it up to him at his will. 'But now hath Nabigant of the Rock reft her thereof, and a right outrageous knight is he and puissant; wherefore hath he commanded a damsel that she bring it to an assembly of knights that is to be held in the Meadow of the Tent of the two damsels, there where Messire Gawain did away the evil custom. The damsel that will bring the Golden Circlet will give it to the knight that shall do best at the assembly. Nabigant is keenly set upon having it, and maketh the more sure for that once aforetime he hath had it by force of arms. And I am going to the knights that

know not these tidings, in order that when they shall hear them, they shall go to the assembly.' Therewithal the knight departeth. The King and Messire Gawain have ridden so far that they come to the tent where Messire Gawain destroyed the evil custom by slaying the two knights. He found the tent garnished within and without in like manner as it was when he was there, and Messire Gawain made the King be seated on a quilted mattress of straw, right costly, and thereafter be disarmed of a squire, and he himself disarmed him, and they washed their hands and faces for the rust wherewith both of them were besmuttered. And Messire Gawain found the chests unlocked that were at the head of the couch, and made the King be apparelled of white rich stuffs that he found, and a robe of cloth of silk and gold, and he clad himself in the like manner, neither was the chest not a whit disfurnished thereby, for the tent was all garnished of rich adornments. When they were thus dight, a man might have sought far or ever he should find so comely knights. The Damsels' Tent

II

Thereupon, behold you the two Damsels of the Tent coming. 'Damsels,' saith Messire Gawain, 'Welcome may you be.' 'Sir,' say they, 'Good adventure may you have both twain. It seemeth us that you take right boldly that which is ours, yet never for neither of us would you do a thing whereof you were beseeched.' 'Messire Gawaïn,' saith the elder, 'No knight is there in this kingdom but would

Arthur and Gawain

be right joyous and he supposed that I loved him, and I prayed you of your love on a day that is past, for the valour of your knighthood, yet never did you grant it me. How durst you have affiance in me of aught, and take the things that are mine own so boldly, when I may not have affiance in you?' 'Damsel, for your courtesy and the good custom of the land; for you told me when the evil customs were overthrown, that all the honours and all the courtesies that are due to knights should ever be ready within for all them that should come hither for harbour.' 'Messire Gawain, you say true, but of right might one let the courtesy tarry and pay back churlishness by churlishness.

III

'The assembly of knights will begin tomorrow in this launde that is so fair. There will be knights in plenty, and the prize will be the Circlet of Gold. Now shall we see who will do best. The assembly will last three whole days, and of one thing at least you may well make boast between you and your comrade, that you have the fairest hostel and the most pleasant and the most quiet of any knights at the assembly.' The younger damsel looketh at King Arthur. 'And you,' saith she, 'What will you do? Will you be as strange toward us as Messire Gawain is friendly with others?'

IV

'Damsel,' saith the King, 'Messire Gawain will do his pleasure and I mine. Strange shall

I not be in respect of you, nor toward other damsels; rather shall they be honoured on my part so long as I live, and I myself will be at your commandment.' 'Sir,' saith she, 'Gramercy greatly. I pray you, therefore, that you be my knight at the tournament.' 'Damsel, this ought I not to refuse you, and right glad at heart shall I be and I may do aught that shall please you; for all knights ought to be at pains for the sake of dame or damsel.' 'Sir,' saith she, 'What is your name?' at the Tent

V

'Damsel,' saith he, 'My name is Arthur, and I am of Tincardoil.' 'Have you nought to do with King Arthur?' 'Damsel, already have I been many times at his court, and, if he loved me not nor I him, I should not be in Messire Gawain's company. In truth, he is the King in the world that I love best.' The damsel looketh at King Arthur, but wotteth not a whit that it is he, and full well is she pleased with the seeming and countenance of him. As for the King, lightly might he have trusted that he should have her as his lady-love so long as he remained with her; but there is much to say between his semblant and his thought, for he showeth good semblant toward the damsel, that hath over much affiance therein, but his thought is on Queen Guenievre in what place soever he may be. For nought loveth he so well as her.

VI

The damsels made stable the horses and purvey for the bodies of the knights right richly

The damsels at night, and they lay in two right rich beds in the midst of the hall, and their arms were all set ready before. The damsels would not depart until such time as they were asleep. The harness of the knights that came to the assembly came on the morrow from all parts. They set up their booths and stretched their tents all round about the launde of the forest. King Arthur and Messire Gawain were risen in the morning and saw the knights come from all parts. The elder damsel cometh to Messire Gawain and saith to him, 'Sir,' saith she, 'I will that you bear to-day red arms that I will lend you, for the love of me, and take heed that they be well employed, and I desire that you should not be known by your arms; rather let it be said that you are the Red Knight, and you shall allow it accordingly.' 'Damsel, Gramercy greatly!' saith Messire Gawain, 'I will do my endeavour in arms the best I may for love of you.' The younger damsel cometh to King Arthur; 'Sir,' saith she, 'My sister hath made her gift and I will make mine. I have a suit of arms of gold, the richest that knight may wear, that I will lend you, for methinketh they will be better employed on you than on ever another knight; so I pray you that you remember me at the assembly in like manner as I shall ofttimes remember you.'

VII

'Damsel,' saith the King, 'Gramercy! No knight is there that should see you but ought to have you in remembrance in his heart for your

courtesy and your worth.' The knights were come about the tents. The King and Messire Gawain were armed and had made caparison their horses right richly. The damsel that should give the Golden Circlet was come. Nabigant of the Rock had brought great fellowships of knights together with him, and ordinance was made for the assembly. and their knights

VIII

The younger damsel saith to King Arthur: 'Well may you know that no knight that is here this day hath better arms than are yours, wherefore take heed that you show you to be good knight for love of me.' 'Damsel,' saith King Arthur, 'God grant that I be so.' So they laid hold on their reins and mounted their horses, that made great leaping and went away a great gallop. Saith the younger damsel to her sister: 'What think you of my knight, doth he not please you?' 'Yea,' saith the elder, 'But sore misliketh me of Messire Gawain for that he is not minded to do as I would have him. But he shall yet aby it dear.' King Arthur and Messire Gawain strike into the midst of the assembly like as it were two lions unchained, and at their first coming they smite down two knights to the ground under the feet of their horses. Messire Gawain taketh the two horses and sendeth them by a squire to the Damsels of the Tent, that made much joy thereof. After that were they not minded to take more booty as of horses or arms, but searched the fellowships on one side and the other; nor was there

Arthur and Gawain do best

no knight that came against them but they pierced his shield or bore him to the ground, insomuch as none was there that might endure their buffets. Nabigant espieth Messire Gawain and cometh toward him, and Messire Gawain toward him again, and they hurtle together either on other so strongly that Messire Gawain beareth Nabigant to the ground, him and his horse together all in a heap. And King Arthur was not idle, for no knight durst come against him but he overthrew him, so as that all withdrew them back and avoided his buffets. And many knights did well that day at the assembly, but none might be the match of either of them twain in deeds of arms, for, save it were Lancelot or Perceval, were no knights on live that had in them so much hardiment and valour. After that it was evensong the knights drew them back to their tents, and they say all that the Knight of the Golden Arms and the Knight of the Red Arms had done better than they all at the assembly. King Arthur and Messire Gawain come back to the tent of the damsels, that make disarm them and do upon them the rich robes and make great joy of them. Thereupon, behold you, a dwarf that cometh: 'Damsels, make great joy! for all they of the assembly say with one accord that your knights have done best this day.' King Arthur and Messire Gawain sate to eat, and right well were they served of every kind of meats and of great cups of wine and sops in wine. King Arthur made the younger damsel sit beside him, and Messire Gawain the elder in

like manner, and when they had eaten they went to lie down and fell on sleep, for right sore weary were they and forspent of the many buffets they had given and received, and they slept until the morrow. Gawain's ill covenant

IX

When the day appeared they rose up. Thereupon, behold you the younger damsel where she cometh and saluteth King Arthur. 'And you, damsel!' saith King Arthur, 'God give you joy and good adventure!' 'Sir,' saith she, 'I will that you bear to-day these white arms that you see here, and that you do no worse to-day than yesterday you did, sith that better you may not do.' 'Messire Gawain,' saith the elder damsel, 'Remember you of the King there where his land was compassed about of a wall of stone, and you harboured one night in his castle, what time you went to seek for the sword wherewith John Baptist was beheaded, when he was fain to take away the sword from you, whereof you had so sore misliking? Natheless, he yielded you up the sword upon covenant that you should do that which a damsel should first ask you to do thereafter, and you promised him loyally that so would you do?' 'Certes, damsel,' saith Messire Gawain, 'Well do I remember the same.' 'Now, therefore,' saith the damsel, 'would I fain prove whether you be indeed so loyal as men say, and whether you will hold your covenant that you made. Wherefore I pray and beseech you that this day you shall

Gawain doth worst

be he that doth worst of all the knights at the assembly, and that you bear none other arms save your own only, so as that you shall be known again of all them that are there present. And, so you will not do this, then will you have failed of your covenant, and I myself will go tell the King that you have broken the promise that you made to him right loyally.' 'Damsel,' saith Messire Gawain, 'Never yet brake I covenant with none, so it were such as I might fulfil or another on my behalf.' King Arthur made arm him of the white arms that the younger damsel had given him, and Messire Gawain of his own, but sore it irked him of this that the damsel hath laid upon him to do, sith that needs must he lose worship and he hold to his covenant, albeit not for nought that is in the world will he fail of the promise he hath made. So they come into the assembly.

X

King Arthur smiteth with his spurs like a good knight and overthroweth two knights in his onset, and Messire Gawain rideth a bandon betwixt two fellowships to be the better known. The most part say, 'See! There is Messire Gawain, the good knight that is King Arthur's nephew.' Nabigant of the Rock cometh toward him as fast as his horse may carry him, lance in rest. Messire Gawain seeth him coming toward him right furiously. He casteth his shield down on the ground and betaketh him to flight as swiftly as he may. They that beheld him, some two score or more, marvel thereof, and say, 'Did ever one see the like overpassing

cowardize!' Nabigant saith that he never yet followed a knight that was vanquished, nor never will follow one of such conditions, for no great prize would it be to take him and win his horse. Other knights come to joust with him, but Messire Gawain fleeth and avoideth them the best he may, and maketh semblance that none is there he durst abide. He draweth toward King Arthur for safety. The King hath great shame of this that he seeth him do, and right sore pains hath he of defending Messire Gawain, for he holdeth as close to him as the pie doth to the bramble when the falcon would take her. In such shame and dishonour was Messire Gawain as long as the assembly lasted, and the knights said that he had gotten him off with much less than he deserved, for that never had they seen so craven knight at assembly of tournament as was he, nor never henceforth would they have dread of him as they had heretofore. From this day forward may many lightly avenge themselves upon him of their kinsfolk and friends that he hath slain by the forest. The assembly broke up in the evening, whereof the King and Messire Gawain were right well pleased. The knights disarm them at their hostels and the King and Messire Gawain at the damsels' tent. and is shamed

XI

With that, behold you! the dwarf that cometh. 'By my head, damsels, your knights go from bad to worse! Of him in the white arms one may even let pass, but Messire

The dwarf jeereth

Gawain is the most coward ever saw I yet, and so he were to run upon me to-morrow and I were armed like as is he, I should think me right well able to defend me against him. 'Tis the devil took him to a place where is such plenty of knights, for the more folk that are there the better may one judge of his ill conditions. And you, Sir,' saith he to the King, 'Wherefore do you keep him company? You would have done best to-day had he not been there. He skulked as close by you, to be out of the buffets, as a hare doth to the wood for the hounds. No business hath good knight to hold company with a coward. I say not this for that I would make him out worse than he is, for I remember the two knights he slew before this tent.' The damsel heareth the dwarf talking and smileth thereat, for she understandeth that blame enough hath Messire Gawain had at the assembly. The knights said at their hostels that they knew not to whom to give the Circlet of Gold, sith that the Knight of the Golden Armour and he of the Red Armour were not there; for they did the best the first day of the assembly, and much they marvelled that they should not come when it was continued on the morrow. 'Gawain,' saith the King, 'Sore blame have you had this day, and I myself have been all shamed for your sake. Never thought I that so good a knight as you might ever have known how to counterfeit a bad knight as you did. You have done much for the love of the damsel, and right well had she avenged herself of you and you

had done her great annoy. Howbeit, and to-morrow your cowardize be such as it hath been to-day, never will the day be when you shall not have blame thereof.' Gawain and Arthur

XII

'By my faith,' saith Messire Gawain, 'Behoveth me do the damsel's pleasure sith that we have fallen by ill-chance into her power.' They went to bed at night and took their rest as soon as they had eaten, and on the morrow the damsel came to Messire Gawain. 'I will,' saith she, 'that you be clad in the same arms as was your comrade on the first day, right rich, that I will lend you, and I will, moreover, that you be knight so good as that never on any day were you better. But I command you, by the faith you pledged me the other day, to obey this caution, that you make yourself known to none, and, so any man in the world shall ask your name, you shall say that you are the knight of the Golden Arms.' 'Damsel,' saith Gawain, 'Gramercy! I will do your pleasure.' The younger damsel cometh back to the King: 'Sir,' saith she, 'I will that you wear new arms: You shall bear them red, the same as Messire Gawain bore the first day, and I pray you be such as you were the first day, or better.'

XIII

'Damsel, I will do my best to amend myself and my doings, and right well pleased am I of that it pleaseth you to say.' Their horses were caparisoned and the knights mounted, all armed.

Gawain winneth the prize

They come together to the tournament with such an onset as that they pass through the thickest of the press and overthrew knights and horses as many as they encountered. King Arthur espieth Nabigant that came right gaily caparisoned, and smiteth him so passing strong a buffet in the midst of his breast that he beareth him down from his horse, in such sort that he breaketh his collar-bone, and presenteth the destrier, by his squire, to the younger damsel, that maketh great joy thereof. And Messire Gawain searcheth the fellowships on all sides, and so well did he search that scarce was one might endure his blows. King Arthur is not idle, but pierceth shields and beateth in helms, the while all look on in wonderment at him and Messire Gawain. The story saith that the King would have done still better but that he put not forth his full strength in deeds of arms, for that Messire Gawain had done so ill the day before, and now he would fain that he should have the prize.

XIV

The damsel that held the Golden Circlet was in the midst of the assembly of knights, and had set it in a right rich casket of ivory with precious stones, right worshipfully. When the damsel saw that the assembly was at an end, she made all the knights stay, and prayed them they should speak judgment true, concealing nought, who had best deserved of arms, and ought therefore of right to have the Golden Circlet. They said all, that of right judgment the Knight of the

Golden Arms and he of the Red Arms ought to have the prize above all the others, but that of these two, he of the Golden Arms ought to have the prize, for so well did he the first day as that no knight might do better, and on the last day likewise, and that if he of the Red Arms had put forth his full strength on the last day, he would have done full as well or better. The Circlet of Gold was brought to Messire Gawain, but it was not known that it was he; and Messire Gawain would fain that it had been given to my lord King Arthur. The knights departed from the assembly. The King and Messire Gawain came back to the tent and brought the Golden Circlet, whereof the damsels made great joy. Thereupon, behold you! the dwarf that cometh back. 'Damsels, better is it to lodge knights such as these than Messire Gawain the coward, the craven that had so much shame at the assembly! You yourselves would have been sore blamed had you lodged him. This knight hath won the Golden Circlet by force of arms, and Messire Gawain nought but shame and reproach.' The damsel laugheth at this that the dwarf saith, and biddeth him on his eyes and head, begone! **of the Golden Circlet**

XV

The King and Messire Gawain were disarmed. 'Sir,' saith the damsel, 'What will you do with the Golden Circlet?' 'Damsel,' saith Messire Gawain, 'I will bear it to him that first won it in sore peril of death, and delivered it to the Queen that ought to have kept it safe, of

The damsels thwarted

whom it hath been reft by force.' The King and Messire Gawain lay the night in the tent. The younger damsel cometh to the King. 'Sir, many feats of arms have you done at the assembly, as I have been told, for love of me, and I am ready to reward you.' 'Damsel, right great thanks. Your reward and your service love I much, and your honour yet more, wherefore I would that you should have all the honour that any damsel may have, for in damsel without honour ought none to put his affiance. Our Lord God grant you to preserve yours.' 'Damsel,' saith she to the other that sitteth before Messire Gawain, 'This Knight and Messire Gawain have taken counsel together. There is neither solace nor comfort in them. Let us leave them to go to sleep, and ill rest may they have, and Lord God defend us ever hereafter from such guests.' 'By my head,' saith the elder damsel, 'were it not for the Golden Circlet that he is bound of right to deliver again to the Queen that had it in charge, who is my Lady, they should not depart from this land in such sort as they will. But, and Messire Gawain still be nice as concerneth damsels, at least I now know well that he is loyal in another-wise, so as that he will not fail of his word.'

XVI

With that the damsels departed, as did likewise the King and Messire Gawain as soon as they saw the day. Nabigant, that was wounded at the tournament, was borne away on a litter.

Meliot of Logres was in quest of Messire Gawain. He met the knights and the harness that came from the assembly, and asked of many if they could tell him tidings of King Arthur's nephew, Messire Gawain, and the most part answer, 'Yea, and right bad tidings enough.' Then they ask him wherefore he demandeth. 'Lords,' saith he, 'His liege man am I, and he ought of right to defend my land against all men, that Nabigant hath taken from me without right nor reason, whom they are carrying from thence in a litter, wherefore I am fain to beseech Messire Gawain that he help me to recover my land.' 'In faith, Sir Knight,' say they, 'We know not of what avail he may be to others that may not help himself. Messire Gawain was at the assembly, but we tell you for true, it was he that did worst thereat.' 'Alas,' saith Meliot of Logres, 'Then have I lost my land, and he hath become even such an one as you tell me.' 'You would readily believe us,' say they, 'had you seen him at the assembly!' Meliot turneth him back, right sorrowful. **Meliot seeketh Gawain**

XVII

King Arthur and Messire Gawain depart from the tent, and come a great pace as though they fain would escape thence to come nigher the land where they would be, and great desire had they of the coming of Lancelot. They rode until that they came one night to the Waste Manor whither the brachet led Messire Gawain when he found the dead knight that

The Waste Manor

Lancelot had slain. They lodged there the night, and found there knights and damsels of whom they were known. The Lady of the Waste Manor sent for succour to her knights, saying that she held there King Arthur that slew other knights, and that his nephew Messire Gawain was also there within, but dearly would she have loved that Lancelot had been with them that slew her brother. Knights in plenty came to her to do hurt to King Arthur and Messire Gawain, but she had at least so much courtesy in her that she would not suffer any of them to do them ill within her hold, albeit she kept seven of their number, full of great hardiment, to guard the entrance of the bridge, so that King Arthur and Messire Gawain might not depart thence save only amidst the points of their spears

XVIII

This high history witnesseth us that Lancelot was departed from the Waste City wherein he was much honoured, and rode until that he came to a forest where he met Meliot of Logres, that was sore dismayed of the tidings he had heard of Messire Gawain. Lancelot asketh him whence he cometh, and he saith from seeking Messire Gawain, of whom he had tidings whereof he was right sorrowful. 'How,' saith Lancelot, 'Is he then otherwise than well?' 'Yea,' saith he, 'As I have heard tell: for he wont to be good knight and hath now become evil. He was at the assembly of knights whereof I met the harness

and the fellowships, and they told me that never yet was such cowardize in any knight, but that a knight who was with him did right well. But howsoever he may have borne himself, right fain am I to find him, for, maugre what any may say, I may scarce believe that he is so bad after all.' 'Sir,' saith Lancelot, 'I will seek him for you, and you can come along with me and it seemeth you good.' Meliot of Logres betaketh him back with Lancelot. They ride until they happen by chance upon the Waste Manor where the King and Messire Gawain were lodged; and they were armed, and were minded to go forth from thence. But the seven knights guarded the issue, all armed. The King and Messire Gawain saw that no good would it do them to remain there within, wherefore they passed over the bridge and came perforce to the place where the seven knights were watching for them. Thereupon, they went toward them all armed and struck among them, and the knights received them on the points of their lances. Lancelot and Meliot

XIX

Thereupon, behold you! Lancelot and the knight with him, whom they had not been looking for. Lancelot espied the King and Messire Gawain; then the knights cried out and struck among them as a hawk striketh amongst larks, and made them scatter on one side and the other. Lancelot hath caught one at his coming, and smiteth him with his spear through the body, and Meliot of Logres slayeth

Arthur rescued another. King Arthur knew Lancelot, and right glad was he to see him safe and sound, as was Messire Gawain likewise. Lancelot and Meliot of Logres made clear the passage for them. The knights departed, for longer durst they not abide. The damsel of the castle held a squire by the hand, that was right passing comely. She knew Lancelot, and when she saw him she called him.

XX

'Lancelot, you slew this squire's brother, and, please God, either he or another shall take vengeance thereof.' Lancelot holdeth his peace when he heareth the dame speak, and departeth from the Waste Hold. Meliot of Logres knew Messire Gawain and Messire Gawain him again, and great joy made they the one of the other. 'Sir,' saith Meliot, 'I am come to lay plaint before you of Nabigant of the Rock that challengeth me of the land whereof I am your man, and saith that he will defend it against none but you only. Sir, the day is full nigh, and if you come not to the day, I shall have lost my quarrel, and you held me thereof in covenant what time I became your man.' 'Right fainly will I go,' saith Messire Gawain. He goeth his way thither accordingly by leave of the King and Lancelot, and saith that he will return to them the speediest he may.

XXI

King Arthur and Lancelot go their way as fast as they may toward the land that was King

Fisherman's. Messire Gawain rideth until he cometh to the land of Nabigant of the Rock. Meliot doeth Nabigant to wit that Messire Gawain was come, and that he was ready to uphold his right by him that was his champion. Nabigant was whole of the wound he gat at the assembly, and held Messire Gawain of full small account for the cowardize that he saw him do, and bid his knights not meddle betwixt them two, for, and Messire Gawain had been four knights he thought to vanquish them all. He issueth forth of his castle all armed, and is come there where Messire Gawain awaited him. Messire Gawain seeth him coming, and so draweth on one side, and Nabigant, that was stark outrageous, setteth his spear in rest and cometh toward Messire Gawain without another word, and smiteth him on the shield so that he maketh his spear fly all in pieces. And Messire Gawain catcheth him right in the midst of his breast, and pierceth him with his spear through the thick of his heart, and he falleth to the ground dead; and the knights run upon Messire Gawain; but he lightly delivereth himself of them, and Meliot of Logres likewise. Messire Gawain entereth the castle by force, doing battle against all the knights, and holdeth them in such a pass as that he maketh them do homage to Meliot of Logres, and deliver up to him the keys of the castle. He maketh them come to an assembly from the whole of the land they had reft away from him, and thereafter departeth and followeth after King Arthur. In the forest, he over-

Gawain slayeth Nabigant

A damsel seeketh Gawain

A taketh a damsel that was going on her way a great pace.

XXII

'Damsel,' saith Messire Gawain, 'Lord God guide you, whither away so fast?' 'Sir,' saith she, 'I am going to the greatest assembly of knights you saw ever.' 'What assembly?' saith Messire Gawain. 'Sir,' saith she, 'At the Palace Meadow, but the knight I am seeking is he that won the Circlet of Gold at the Meadow of the Tent. Fair Sir, can you give me any tidings of him?' saith she. 'Damsel,' saith Messire Gawain, 'What would you do herein?' 'Certes, Sir, I would right fain find him. My Lady, that kept the Circlet of Gold for the son of the Widow Lady, that won it aforetime, hath sent me to seek him.' 'For what intent, damsel?' saith Messire Gawain. 'Sir, my Lady sendeth for him and beseecheth him by me, for the sake of the Saviour of the World, that if he had ever pity of dame or damsel, he will take vengeance on Nabigant that hath slain her men and destroyed her land, for she hath been told how he that won back the Golden Circlet ought of right to take vengeance upon him.'

XXIII

'Damsel,' saith Messire Gawain, 'Be not any longer troubled hereof, for I tell you that the knight that won the Golden Circlet by prize of arms hath killed Nabigant already.' 'Sir,' saith she, 'How know you this?' 'I know the knight well,' saith he, 'And I saw

him slay him, and behold, here is the Circlet of Gold that I have as a token hereof, for that he beareth it to him that hath won the Graal, to the intent that your Lady may be quit of her charge.' Messire Gawain showeth her the Golden Circlet in the casket of ivory, that he kept very nigh himself. Right joyful was the damsel that the matter had thus fallen out, and goeth her way back again to tell her Lady of her joy. Messire Gawain goeth on his way toward the assembly, for well knoweth he that, and King Arthur and Lancelot have heard the tidings, there will they be. He goeth thitherward as fast as he may, and as straight, and scarce hath he ridden away or ever he met a squire that seemed right weary, and his hackney sore worn of the way. Messire Gawain asked him whence he came, and the squire said to him, 'From the land of King Arthur, where is great war toward, for that none knoweth not what hath become of him. Many folk go about saying that he is dead, for never sithence that he departed from Cardoil, and Messire Gawain and Lancelot with him, have no tidings been heard of him; and he left the Queen at Cardoil to take his place, and also on account of her son's death, and the most part say that he is dead. Briant of the Isles and my Lord Kay with him are burning his land, and carrying off plunder before all the castles. Of all the Knights of the Table Round are there now no more than five and thirty, and of these are ten sore wounded, and they are in Cardoil, and there protect the land the best they may.'

Evil tidings

Arthur winneth

XXIV

When Messire Gawain heareth these tidings, they touch his heart right sore, so that he goeth the straightest he may toward the assembly, and the squire with him that was sore fordone. Messire Gawain found King Arthur and Lancelot, and the knights were come from all the kingdom to the piece of ground. For a knight was come thither that had brought a white destrier and borne thither a right rich crown of gold, and it was known throughout all the lands that marched with this, that the knight that should do best at the assembly should have the destrier and the crown, for the Queen that ware it was dead, and it would behove him to guard and defend the land whereof she had been Lady. On account of these tidings had come thither great plenty of folk and of folk. King Arthur and Messire Gawain and Lancelot set them of one side. The story saith that at this assembly King Arthur bare the red shield that the damsel gave him; Messire Gawain had his own, such as he was wont to bear, and Lancelot a green shield that he bare for the love of the knight that was slain for helping him in the forest They struck into the assembly like lions unchained, and cast down three knights at their first onset. They searched the fellowships on every side, smote down knights and overthrew horses.

XXV

King Arthur overtook no knight but he clave his shield to the boss: all swerved aside and

avoided his buffets. And Messire Gawain and Lancelot are not idle on the other hand, but each held well his place. But the more part had wonderment looking at the King, for he holdeth him at bay like a lion when the stag-hounds would attack him. The assembly lasted throughout on such wise, and when it came to an end, the knights said and adjudged that the Knight of the Red Shield had surpassed all other in doing well. The knight that had brought the crown came to the King, but knew him not a whit: 'Sir,' saith he, 'You have by your good deeds of arms won this crown of gold and this destrier, whereof ought you to make great joy, so only you have so much valour in you as that you may defend the land of the best earthly Queen that is dead, and whether the King be alive or dead none knoweth, wherefore great worship will it be to yourself and you may have prowess to maintain the land, for right broad is it and right rich and of high sovranty.'

a dolorous prize

XXVI

Saith King Arthur, 'Whose was the land, and what was the name of the Queen whose crown I see?' 'Sir, the King's name was Arthur, and the best king in the world was he; but in his kingdom the more part say that he is dead. And this crown was the crown of Queen Guenievre that is dead and buried, whereof is sore sorrow. The knights that may not leave Cardoil lest Briant of the Isles should seize the city, they sent me to the kingdom of Logres and charged me with the crown and destrier for

A grievous sorrow

that I have knowledge of the isles and foreign lands; wherefore they prayed me I should go among the assemblies of knights, that so I might hear tidings of my Lord King Arthur and my Lord Gawain and Lancelot, and, so I might find them, that I should tell them how the land hath fallen into this grievous sorrow.' King Arthur heareth tidings whereof he is full sorrowful. He draweth on one side, and the knights make the most grievous dole in the world. Lancelot knoweth not what he may do, and saith between his teeth that now hath his joy come to an end and his knighthood is of no avail, for that he hath lost the high Queen, the valiant, that heart and comfort gave him and encouragement to do well. The tears ran down from his comely eyes right amidst his face and through the ventail, and, had he durst make other dole, yet greater would it have been. Of the mourning the King made is there nought to speak, for this sorrow resembleth none other. He holdeth the crown of gold, and looketh full oft at the destrier for love of her, for he had given it her; and Messire Gawain may not stint of making dole.

XXVII

'Certes,' saith he, 'Now may I well say that the best Queen in the world and of most understanding is dead, nor never hereafter shall be none of equal worth.' 'Sir,' saith Lancelot to the King, 'So it please you, and Messire Gawain be willing, I will go back toward Cardoil, and help to defend your land to the best I may, for

sore is it discounselled, until such time as you shall be come from the Graal.' 'Certes,' saith Messire Gawain to the King, 'Lancelot hath spoken well, so you grant him your consent.' 'That do I with right good will,' saith the King, 'And I pray him right heartily that he go thither and be guardian of my land and the governance thereof, until such time as God shall have brought me back.' Lancelot taketh leave of the King and goeth his way back, all sorrowing and full of discontent. **Lancelot returneth**

BRANCH XXII

INCIPIT

Perceval's castle

OF Lancelot the story is here silent, and so beginneth another branch of the Graal in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

TITLE I

You may well understand that King Arthur is no whit joyful. He maketh the white destrier go after him, and hath the crown of gold full near himself. They ride until they come to the castle that belonged to King Fisherman, and they found it as rich and fair as you have heard told many a time. Perceval, that was there within, made right great joy of their coming, as did all the priests and ancient knights. Perceval leadeth King Arthur, when he was disarmed, into the chapel where the Graal was, and Messire Gawain maketh present to Perceval of the Golden Circlet, and telleth him that the Queen sendeth it to him, and relateth also how Nabigant had seized it, and moreover, how Nabigant was dead. The King offereth the crown that had been Queen Guenievre's. When Perceval knew that she was dead, he was right sorrowful thereof in his heart, and wept and lamented her right sweetly. He showeth them the tomb of King Fisherman,

and telleth them that none had set the tabernacle there above the coffin, but only the commandment of Our Lord, and he showeth them a rich pall that is upon the coffin, and telleth them that every day they see a new one there not less rich than is this one. King Arthur looketh at the sepulchre and saith that never tofore hath he seen none so costly. A smell issueth therefrom full delicate and sweet of savour. The King sojourneth in the castle and is highly honoured, and beholdeth the richesse and the lordship and the great abundance that is everywhere in the castle, insomuch that therein is nought wanting that is needful for the bodies of noble folk. Perceval had made set the bodies of the dead knights in a charnel beside an old chapel in the forest, and the body of his uncle that had slain himself so evilly. Behind the castle was a river, as the history testifieth, whereby all good things came to the castle, and this river was right fair and plenteous. Josephus witnesseth us that it came from the Earthly Paradise and compassed the castle around and ran on through the forest as far as the house of a worshipful hermit, and there lost the course and had peace in the earth. All along the valley thereof was great plenty of everything continually, and nought was ever lacking in the rich castle that Perceval had won. The castle, so saith the history, had three names.

Three names thereof

II

One of the names was Eden, the second, Castle of Joy, and the third, Castle of Souls.

The bell and chalice

Now Josephus saith that none never passed away therein but his soul went to Paradise. King Arthur was one day at the castle windows with Messire Gawain. The King seeth coming before him beyond the bridge a great procession of folk one before another; and he that came before was all clad in white, and bare a full great cross, and each of the others a little one, and the more part came singing with sweet voices and bear candles burning, and there was one behind that carried a bell with the clapper and all at his neck. 'Ha, God,' saith King Arthur, 'What folk be these?' 'Sir,' saith Perceval, 'I know them all save the last. They are the hermits of this forest, that come to chant within yonder before the Holy Graal, three days in the week.'

III

When the hermits came nigh the castle, the King went to meet them, and the knights adore the crosses and bow their heads before the good men. As soon as they were come into the holy chapel, they took the bell from the last and smote thereon at the altar, and then set it on the ground, and then began they the service, most holy and most glorious. The history witnesseth us that in the land of King Arthur at this time was there not a single chalice. The Graal appeared at the sacring of the mass, in five several manners that none ought not to tell, for the secret things of the sacrament ought none to tell openly but he to whom God hath given it. King Arthur beheld

all the changes, the last whereof was the change into a chalice. And the hermit that chanted the mass found a brief under the corporal and declared the letters, to wit, that our Lord God would that in such vessel should His body be sacrificed, and that it should be set upon record. The history saith not that there were no chalices elsewhere, but that in all Great Britain and in the whole kingdom was none. King Arthur was right glad of this that he had seen, and had in remembrance the name and the fashion of the most holy chalice. Then he asked the hermit that bare the bell, whence this thing came? 'Sir,' saith he to Messire Gawain, 'I am the King for whom you slew the giant, whereby you had the sword wherewith St. John was beheaded, that I see on this altar. I made baptize me before you and all those of my kingdom, and turn to the New Law, and thereafter I went to a hermitage by the sea, far from folk, where I have been of a long space. I rose one night at matins and looked under my hermitage and saw that a ship had taken haven there. I went thither when the sea was retreated, and found within the ship three priests and their clerks, that told me their names and how they were called in baptism. All three were named Gregory, and they came from the Land of Promise, and told me that Solomon had cast three bells, one for the Saviour of the World, and one for His sweet Mother, and one for the honour of His saints, wherefore they had brought this hither by His commandment into this kingdom for that we had none

An ancient friend

Aristot of Moraine

here. They told me that and I should bear it into this castle, they would take all my sins upon themselves, by Our Lord's pleasure, in such sort as that I should be quit thereof. And I in like manner have brought it hither by the commandment of God, who willeth that this should be the pattern of all those that shall be fashioned in the realm of this island where never aforetime have been none.' 'By my faith,' saith Messire Gawain to the hermit, 'I know you right well for a worshipful man, for you held your covenant truly with me.' King Arthur was right glad of this thing, as were all they that were within. It seemed him that the noise thereof was like the noise that he had heard sound ever since he had moved from Cardoil. The hermits went their way each to his hermitage when they had done the service.

IV

One day, as the King sate at meat in the hall with Perceval and Messire Gawain and the ancient knights, behold you therewithal one of the three Damsels of the Car that cometh, and she was smitten all through her right arm. 'Sir,' saith she to Perceval, 'Have mercy on your mother and your sister and on us. Aristot of Moraine, that is cousin to the Lord of the Moors that you slew, warreth upon your mother, and hath carried off your sister by force into the castle of a vavasour of his, and saith that he will take her to wife, and will have all her land that your mother ought to hold of right, maugre your head. But never had knight custom so

cruel as he, for when he shall have espoused the damsel, whomsoever she may be, yet will he never love her so well but that he shall cut off her head with his own hand, and so thereafter go seek for another to slay in like manner. Natheless in one matter hath he good custom, that never will he do shame to none until such time as he hath espoused her. Sir, I was with my Lady your sister when he maimed me in this manner. Wherefore your mother sendeth you word and prayeth you that you succour her, for you held her in covenant that so you would do and she should have need thereof and you should know it; for and you consent to her injury and loss, the shame will be your own.' Perceval neard these tidings, and sore sorrowful was he thereof. 'By my head,' saith the King to Perceval, 'I and my nephew, so please you, will go to help you.' 'Sir,' saith he, 'Gramercy, but go and achieve your own affair also, for sore need have you thereof; wherefore I pray and beseech you that you be guardian of the castle of Camelot, if that my lady mother shall come thither, for thereof make I you lord and champion, and albeit the castle be far away from you, yet garnish it and guard it, for it is builded in a place right fair.'

The two Camelots

V

Lords, think not that it is this Camelot whereof these tellers of tales do tell their tales, there, where King Arthur so often held his court. This Camelot that was the Widow Lady's stood upon the uttermost headland of

Arthur's Camelot

the wildest isle of Wales by the sea to the West. Nought was there save the hold and the forest and the waters that were round about it. The other Camelot, of King Arthur's, was situate at the entrance of the kingdom of Logres, and was peopled of folk and was seated at the head of the King's land, for that he had in his governance all the lands that on that side marched with his own.

BRANCH XXIII

TITLE I

OF Perceval the story is here silent, and saith that King Arthur and Messire Gawain have taken leave of Perceval and all them of the castle. The King leaveth him the good destrier that he won, with the golden crown. They have ridden, he and Messire Gawain together, until they are come to a waste ancient castle that stood in a forest. The castle would have been right fair and rich had any folk wonned therein, but none there were save one old priest and his clerk that lived within by their own toil. The King and Messire Gawain lodged there the night, and on the morrow went into a right rich chapel that was therein to hear mass, and it was painted all around of right rich colours of gold and azure and other colours. The images were right fair that were there painted, and the figures of them for whom the images were made. The King and Messire Gawain looked at them gladly. When the mass was said, the priest cometh to them and saith: 'Lords,' saith he, 'These imagings are right fair, and he that had them made is full loyal, and dearly loved the lady and her son for whom he had them made. Sir,' saith the priest, 'It is a true history.' 'Of whom is the history, fair Sir?'

Arthur and Gawain

A strange story

saith King Arthur. 'Of a worshipful vavasour that owned this hold, and of Messire Gawain, King Arthur's nephew, and his mother. Sir,' saith the priest, 'Messire Gawain was born there within and held up and baptized, as you may see here imaged, and he was named Gawain for the sake of the lord of this castle that had that name. His mother, that had him by King Lot, would not that it should be known. She set him in a right fair coffer, and prayed the good man of this castle that he would carry him away and leave him where he might perish, but and if he would not do so, she would make another do it. This Gawain, that was loyal and would not that the child should be put to death, made seal letters at the pillow-bere of his cradle that he was of lineage royal on the one side and the other, and set therein gold and silver so as that the child might be nurtured in great plenty, and spread above the child a right rich coverlid. He carried him away to a far distant country, and so came one early morning to a little homestead where dwelt a right worshipful man. He delivered the child to him and his wife, and bade them they should keep him and nurture him well, and told them that it might be much good should come to them thereof. The vavasour turned him back, and they took charge of the child and nurtured him until that he were grown, and then took him to Rome to the Holy Father and showed him the sealed letters. The Holy Father saw them and understood that he was the son of a King. He had pity upon him, and gave him to understand

that he was of his kindred. After that, he was elected to be Emperor of Rome. But he would not be Emperor lest he should be reproached of his birth that had before been concealed from him. He departed thence, and lived afterwards within yonder. Now is it said that he is one of the best knights in the world, insomuch that none durst take possession of this castle for dread of him, nor of this great forest that lieth round about it. For, when the vavasour that dwelt here was dead, he left to Messire Gawain, his foster-son, this castle, and made me guardian thereof until such time as Messire Gawain should return.' Of Gawain's birth

II

The King looketh at Messire Gawain, and seeth him stoop his head toward the ground for shame. 'Fair nephew, be not ashamed, for as well might you reproach me of the same. Of your birth hath there been great joy, and dearly ought one to love the place and honour it, where so good a knight as are you was born.' When the priest understood that it was Messire Gawain, he made great cheer to him, and was all shamed of that he had recorded as concerning his birth. But he saith to him: 'Sir, small blame ought you to have herein, for you were confirmed in the law that God hath established and in loyalty of marriage of King Lot and your mother. This thing King Arthur well knoweth, and our Lord God be praised for that you have come hither!'

BRANCH XXIV

TITLE I

Of Meliant

HERE the story is silent of the kingdom, and of King Arthur and Messire Gawain that remain in the castle to maintain and guard it until they shall have garnished it of folk. Here speaketh it word of the knight's son of the Waste Manor, there whither the brachet led Messire Gawain where he found the knight that Lancelot had slain. He had one son whose name was Meliant, and he had not forgotten his father's death; rather, thereof did wrath rankle in his heart. He heard tell that Briant of the Isles had great force and great puissance, and that he warred upon King Arthur's land, insomuch as that he had already slain many of his knights. Thitherward goeth he, and is come to where Briant was in a castle of his own. He telleth him how Lancelot had slain his father in such sort, and prayeth him right courteously that he would make him knight, for that right fain would he avenge his father, and therefore would he help him in the war the best he might. Briant made much joy thereof, and made him knight in right costly sort, and he was the comeliest knight and the most valiant of his age in Briant's court, and greatly did he desire to meet with Lancelot. They marvelled much in the land and kingdom

what had become of him. The more part thought that he was dead, albeit dead he was not, but rather sound and hale and whole, had it not been for the death of Queen Guenievre, whereof the sorrow so lay at his heart that he might not forget it. He rode one day amidst a forest, and overtook a knight and a damsel that made great joy together, singing and making disport. 'By God,' saith the damsel, 'If this knight that cometh here will remain, he shall have right good lodging. It is already nigh eventide, and never will he find hostel so good to-day.' 'Damsel,' saith Lancelot, 'Of good hostel have I sore need, for I am more than enough weary.' 'So be all they,' saith she, 'that come from the land of the rich King Fisherman, for none may suffer the pain and travail and he be not good knight.' and Lancelot

II

'Ah, damsel,' saith Lancelot, 'Which is the way to the castle whereof you speak?' 'Sir,' saith the knight, 'You will go by this cross that you see before you, and we will go by that other way, to a certain hold. Haply we shall find you at the castle or ever you depart thence.' Lancelot goeth his way and leaveth them. 'By my head,' saith the damsel to the knight, 'This that goeth there is Lancelot. He knoweth me not, albeit I know him well, and I hear that he is sore troubled of his sorrow and mis-ease. Natheless, please God, I will have vengeance of him or ever he departeth from the castle whither he goeth to harbour. He made marry

The Castle of Griffons

perforce a knight that loved me better than aught beside, and to a damsel that he loved not a whit. And so much might he still better perceive when he saw that she ate not at his table, but was seated along with the squires, and that none did aught for her at the castle. But the knight will not abandon her for his own honour, and for that I should be blamed thereof.' The evening draweth on and Lancelot goeth toward the castle, that was right uneath to find and in an unfrequented part. He espieth it at the head of the forest, and seeth that it is large and strong, with strong barbicans embattelled, and at the entrance of the gateway were fifteen heads of knights hanging. He found without a knight that came from the forest, and asked him what castle it was, and he made answer that it was called the Castle of the Griffon. 'And why are these heads hanging at this door?' 'Sir,' saith he, 'The daughter of the lord of the castle is the fairest in the world and that is known in any kingdom, and needs must she be offered to wife to all knights that harbour within. He that can draw a sword that is fixed in a column in the midst of the hall, and fetch it forth, he shall have her of right without forfeit.

III

'All these have made assay whose heads you see hanging at the door, but never might none of them remove the sword, and on this occasion were they beheaded. Now is it said that none may draw it forth, unless he that draweth be

better knight than another, and needs must he be one of them that have been at the Graal. But, and you be minded to believe me, fair Sir,' saith the knight, 'You will go elsewhither, for ill lodging is it in a place where one must needs set body and life in adventure of death, and none ought to be blamed for escaping from his own harm. Sir, the castle is right fell, for it hath underground, at the issue of a cavern that is there, a lion and a griffon that have devoured more than half a hundred knights.' 'Sir,' saith Lancelot, 'It is evening, nor know I how I may go farther this day, for I know not whither to go sith that I know not the places nor the ways of the forest.' 'Sir,' saith the knight, 'I speak only for your own good, and God grant you depart hence, honour safe.' Lancelot findeth the door of the castle all open, and entereth in, all armed, and alighteth before the master-hall. The King was leaning at the windows, and biddeth stall his horse.

Lancelot lodgeth therein

IV

Lancelot is entered into the hall, and findeth knights and damsels at the tables and playing at the chess, but none did he find to salute him nor make him cheer of his coming save the lord only, for such was the custom of the castle. The lord bade him be disarmed. 'Sir,' saith he, 'Right well may you allow me wear my arms, for they be the fairest garniture and the richest I have.' 'Sir,' saith the lord of the castle, 'No knight eateth armed within yonder, but he that cometh armed in hither disarmeth

Lancelot in peril

himself by my leave. He may take his arms again without gainsay so neither I nor other desire to do him a hurt.' With that two squires disarm him. The lord of the castle maketh bring a right rich robe wherein to apparel him. The tables were set and the meats served. The damsel issued forth of her chamber and was accompanied of two knights as far as the hall. She looketh at Lancelot, and seeth that he is a right comely knight, and much liketh her of his bearing and countenance, and she thinketh to herself that sore pity would it be so comely knight should have his head smitten off.

V

Lancelot saluted the damsel and made great cheer, and when they had eaten in hall, forthwith behold you, the damsel where she cometh that Lancelot overtook in the forest with the knight. 'Sir,' saith she to the lord of the castle, 'You have harboured this night your deadly enemy that slew your brother at the Waste Manor.' 'By my faith,' saith the lord of the manor, 'I think not so, for him would I not have harboured, nor will I not believe it for true until such time as I have proved it. Sir,' saith he to Lancelot, 'Make the demand that the others make!' 'What is it?' saith Lancelot. 'See there my daughter! Ask her of me, and if you be such as you ought to be, I will give her to you.' 'Sir,' saith Lancelot, 'No knight is there in the world so good but ought to plume him upon having her to wife, so always she were willing, and, so I thought

that you would be willing to give her to me, I would willingly ask you.' Lancelot spake otherwise than as he thought, for the departing of the Queen and the sorrow thereof lay so at his heart that never again might he lean upon any love in the world, neither of dame nor damsel. He asked his daughter of the knight of the castle, and came before him to save the custom so that he might not have blame thereof. And he showed him the sword that is in the column, all inlaid with gold. 'Go,' saith he, 'and fulfil the custom, as other knights have done.' 'What is it?' saith Lancelot. 'They might not draw forth the sword from this column, and so failed of my daughter and of their lives.' 'Lord God,' saith Lancelot, 'Defend me from this custom!' And he cometh toward the column as fast as he may, and seizeth the sword with both hands. So soon as he touched it, the sword draweth it forth with such a wrench that the column quaked thereof. The damsel was right joyful thereat, albeit she misdoubted the fellness and cruelty of her father, for never yet had she seen knight that pleased her so much to love as he. 'Sir,' saith the other damsel, 'I tell you plainly, this is Lancelot, the outrageous, that slew your brother. Natheless, is it no lie that he is one of the best knights of the world, albeit by the stoutness of his knighthood and his valour many an outrage hath he done, and more shall he yet do and he escape you, and, so you will believe me, you will never allow him to depart thus; sith that and you

Lancelot draweth a sword

damsel loveth Lancelot

A kill him or slay him you will save the life of many a knight.' The daughter of the lord of the castle is sore displeased of the damsel for this that she saith, and looketh at Lancelot from time to time and sigheth, but more durst she not do. Much marvelleth she, sith that Lancelot hath drawn the sword forth of the column, that he asketh her not of her father as his own liege woman, but he was thinking of another thing, and never was he so sorrowful of any lady as he was for the Queen. But whatsoever thought or desire he may have therein, he telleth the lord of the castle that he holdeth him to his covenant made at such time as the sword was still fixed in the column. 'I have a right not to hold thereto,' saith the lord of the castle, 'Nor shall I break not my vow and I fail you herein; for no man is bound to give his daughter to his mortal enemy. Sith that you have slain my brother, you are my mortal enemy, and were I to give her to you, she ought not to wish it, and were she to grant you her love she would be a fool and a madwoman.' Right sorrowful is the damsel of this that she heareth her father say. She would fain that Lancelot and she were in the forest, right in the depth thereof. But Lancelot had no mind to be as she was thinking. The lord of the castle made guard the gateway of the castle well, in such sort that Lancelot might issue therefrom on no side. Afterward he bade his knights privily that they take heed on their lives that they be all ready on the morrow and all garnished of their arms, for that it was his

purpose to smite off Lancelot's head and hang it above all the others. and sendeth him counsel

VI

The daughter of the lord knew these tidings and was right sorrowful thereof, for she thinketh never more to have joy at heart and he shall be slain in such manner. She sendeth him greeting by her own privy messenger, as she that loveth him better than aught else living in the world, and so biddeth and prayeth him be garnished of his arms, and ready to protect his life, for that her father is fain to smite off his head. 'Sir,' saith the messenger, 'Your force would avail you nought as against my lord, for to-morrow there will be a dozen knights all armed at the issue of the gate whereby you entered to-night, and he saith that he purposeth to cut off your head there where he cut the heads off the other knights. Without the gate there will likewise be another dozen knights all armed. No knight is there in the world so good as that he might issue forth of this castle through the midst of these four and twenty knights, but my lady sendeth you word that there is a cavern under this castle that goeth therefrom underground as far as the forest, so that a knight may well pass thereby all armed, but there is therein a lion, the fiercest and most horrible in the world, and two serpents that are called griffons, that have the face of a man and the beaks of birds and eyes of an owl and teeth of a dog and ears of an ass and feet of a lion and tail of a serpent, and they have couched

Lancelot misliketh it

them therewithin, but never saw no man beasts so fell and felonous. Wherefore the damsel biddeth you go by that way, by everything that you have ever loved, and that you fail her not, for she would fain speak with you at the issue of the cavern in an orchard that is nigh a right broad river not far from this castle, and will make your destrier be brought after you underground.' 'By my head,' saith Lancelot, 'And she had not conjured me in such sort, and were it not for love of herself, I would have rather set myself in hazard with the knights than with the wild beasts, for far fainer would I have delivered myself from them, and so I might, than go forth in such-wise.' 'She sendeth you word,' saith the messenger, 'that so you do not thus, no further trouble will she take concerning you. She doth it of dread lest she lose your love; and here behold a brachet that she sendeth you by me that you will carry with you into the cavern. So soon as you shall see the serpent griffons that have couched them therein, you shall show them this and cast her down before them. The griffons love her as much as one beast may love another, and shall have such joy and such desire to play with the brachet that they will leave you alone, and have such good will toward you that they will not look at you after to do you any hurt. But no man is there in the world, no matter how well soever he were armed, nor how puissant soever he were in himself, might never pass them otherwise, but he should be devoured of them. But no safeguard may you have as against the

lion but of God only and your own hardiment.' but
'Tell my damsel,' saith Lancelot, 'that all her escapeth
commandment will I do, but this cowardize thereby
resembleth none other, that I shall go fight with beasts and leave to do battle with knights.' This was then repeated to the damsel, that marvelled her much thereat, and said that he was the hardiest knight in the world.

VII

Lancelot armed him toward daybreak, and had his sword girt, his shield at his neck, and his spear in his hand. So he entered into the cavern, all shamefast, and the brachet followeth after, that he deigned not to carry, and so cometh he to the place where the griffons were. So soon as they heard him coming they dress them on their feet, and then writhe along as serpents, then cast forth such fire, and so bright a flame amidst the rock, as that all the cavern is lighted up thereof, and they see by the brightness of light of their jaws the brachet coming. So soon as they have espied her, they carry her in their claws and make her the greatest cheer in the world. Lancelot passeth beyond without gainsay, and espieth, toward the issue of the cavern, the lion that was come from the forest all famished. He cometh thither right hardily, sword drawn. The lion cometh toward him, jaws yawning, and claws bared, thinking to fix them in his habergeon, but Lancelot preventeth him and smiteth him so stoutly that he cutteth off thigh and leg together. When the lion feeleth himself thus

Lancelot slayeth a lion

maimed, he seizeth him by the teeth and the claws of his fore feet and rendeth away half the skirt of his habergeon. Thereupon Lancelot waxeth wroth. He casteth his shield to the ground and approacheth the lion closer. He seeth that he openeth his jaws wide to avenge himself, and thrusteth his sword the straightest he may into his gullet, and the lion giveth out a roar and falleth dead. The damsel, that had come into the cavern, heareth that the lion is dead.

VIII

Lancelot issueth forth and so cometh into the orchard beside the forest, and wiped his sword on the freshness of the green grass. Thereupon behold you the damsel that cometh. 'Sir,' saith she to Lancelot, 'Are you wounded in any place?' 'Damsel, nowhere, thank God!' Another damsel leadeth a horse into the orchard. The damsel of the castle looketh at Lancelot. 'Sir,' saith the damsel, 'Meseemeth that you are not over joyous.' 'Damsel,' saith he, 'If I be not, I have good right, for I have lost the thing in the world that most I loved.' 'And you have won me,' saith she, 'so you remain not here, that am the fairest damsel in this kingdom, and I have saved you your life for this, that you grant me your love, for mine own would I fain give to you.' 'Gramercy, damsel,' saith Lancelot, 'Your love and your good will fain would I have; but neither you nor none other damsel ought not to have affiance in me, and I might

so soon set carelessly aside the love to whom my heart owed its obedience, for the worthiness and the courtesy that were lodged in her. Nor never hereafter, so long as I live, shall I love none other in like manner; wherefore all others commend I to God, and to yourself, as for leave-taking to one at whose service I fain would be; I say that if you shall have need of me, and so I be in place and free, I will do all I may to protect your honour.' and denieth the damsel

IX

'Ha, God!' saith the damsel, 'How am I betrayed, sith that I am parted from the best knight in the world! Lancelot, you have done that which never yet no knight might do! Now am I grieved that you should escape on such wise, and that your life hath been saved in this manner by me. Better should I love you mine own dead, than another's living. Now would I fain that you had had your head smitten off, and that it were hanging with the others! So would I solace myself by beholding it!' Lancelot took no account of that he heard, for the grief that lay at his heart of the Queen. He mounteth on his horse and issueth forth of the orchard by a postern gate, and entereth into the forest, and commendeth him to God. The lord of the Castle of the Griffons marvelleth much that Lancelot delayeth so long. He thinketh that he durst not come down, and saith to his knights, 'Let us go up and cut off his head, sith that he durst not come down.' He maketh search for him all through the hall

Lancelot rideth away

and the chambers, but findeth him not. 'He hath gone,' saith he, 'through the cavern, so have the griffons devoured him.' So he sendeth the twain most hardy of his knights to see. But the brachet had returned after the damsel, whereof the griffons were wroth, and they forthwith seized on the two knights that entered into their cavern and slew them and devoured.

X

When the lord of the castle knew it, he went into the chamber where his daughter was, and found her weeping, and thinketh that it is for the two knights that are dead. News is brought him that the lion is dead at the issue of the cavern, and thereby well knoweth he that Lancelot is gone. He biddeth his knights follow after him, but none was there so hardy as that he durst follow. The damsel was right fain they should go after him, if only they might bring him back to the castle, for so mortally was she taken of his love that she thought of none other thing. But Lancelot had her not in remembrance, but only another, and rode on sadly right amidst the forest, and looked from time to time at the rent the lion had made in his habergeon. He rideth until he is come toward evening to a great valley where was forest on the one side and the other, and the valley stretched onward half a score great leagues Welsh. He looketh to the right, and on the top of the mountain beside the valley he seeth a chapel newly builded that was right fair

and rich, and it was covered of lead, and had at the back two quoins that seemed to be of gold. By the side of this chapel were three houses dight right richly, each standing by itself facing the chapel. There was a right fair grave-yard round about the chapel, that was enclosed at the compass of the forest, and a spring came down, full clear, from the heights of the forest before the chapel and ran into the valley with a great rushing; and each of the houses had its own orchard, and the orchard an enclosure. Lancelot heareth vespers being chanted in the chapel, and seeth the path that turned thitherward, but the mountain is so rugged that he could not go along it on horseback. So he alighteth, and leadeth his horse after him by the reins until he cometh nigh the chapel.

Lancelot at Avalon

XI

There were three hermits therewithin that had sung their vespers, and came over against Lancelot. They bowed their heads to him and he saluted them, and then asked of them what place was this? And they told him that the place there was Avalon. They make stable his horse. He left his arms without the chapel and entereth therein, and saith that never hath he seen none so fair nor so rich. There were within three other places, right fair and seemly dight of rich cloths of silk and rich corners and fringes of gold. He seeth the images and the crucifixes all newly fashioned, and the chapel

The two coffins illumined of rich colours; and moreover in the midst thereof were two coffins, one against the other, and at the four corners four tall wax tapers burning, that were right rich, in four right rich candlesticks. The coffins were covered with two palls, and there were clerks that chanted psalms in turn on the one side and the other. 'Sir,' saith Lancelot to one of the hermits, 'For whom were these coffins made?' 'For King Arthur and Queen Guinievre.' 'King Arthur is not yet dead,' saith Lancelot. 'No, in truth, please God! but the body of the Queen lieth in the coffin before us, and in the other is the head of her son, until such time as the King shall be ended, to whom God grant long life! But the Queen bade at her death that his body should be set beside her own when he shall end. Hereof have we the letters and her seal in this chapel, and this place made she be builded new on this wise or ever she died.'

XII

When Lancelot heareth that it is the Queen that lieth in the coffin, he is so straitened in his heart and in his speech that never a word may he say. But no semblant of grief durst he make other than such as might not be perceived, and right great comfort to him was it that there was an image of Our Lady at the head of the coffin. He knelt down the nighest he might to the coffin, as it had been to worship the image, and set his face and his mouth to the stone of the coffin, and sorroweth for her right

sweetly. 'Ha, Lady,' saith he, 'But that I dread the blame of the people, never again would I seek to depart from this place, but here would I save my soul and pray for yours; so would it be much recomforting to me that I should be so nigh, and should see the sepulchre wherein your body lieth that had so great sweetness and bounty. God, grant me of your pleasure, that at my death I may still be a-nigh, and that I may die in such manner and in such place as that I may be shrouded and buried in this holy chapel where this body lieth.' The night cometh on. A clerk cometh to the hermits and saith, 'Never yet did no knight cry mercy of God so sweetly, nor of His sweet Mother, as did this knight that is in the chapel.' And the hermits make answer that knights for the most part do well believe in God. They come to the chapel for him and bid him come thence, for that meat is ready and he should come to eat, and after that go to sleep and rest, for it is full time so to do. He telleth them that as for his eating this day it is stark nought, for a desire and a will hath taken him to keep vigil in the chapel before one of the images of Our Lady. No wish had he once to depart thence before the day, and he would fain that the night should last far longer than it did. The good men durst not force him against his will; they say, rather, that the worshipful man is of good life who will keep watch in such manner throughout the night without drink or meat, for all that he seemeth to be right weary.

Lancelot his vigil

Lancelot and Kay

XIII

Lancelot was in the chapel until the morrow before the tomb. The hermits apparelled them to do the service that they chanted each day, mass for the soul of the Queen and her son. Lancelot heareth them with right good will. When the masses were sung, he taketh leave of the hermits and looketh at the coffin right tenderly. He commendeth the body that lieth therein to God and His sweet Mother; then findeth he without the chapel his horse accoutred ready, and mounteth forthwith, and departeth, and looketh at the place and the chapel so long as he may see them. He hath ridden so far that he is come nigh Cardoil, and findeth the land wasted and desolate, and the towns burnt, whereof is he sore grieved. He meeteth a knight that came from that part, and he was wounded full sore. Lancelot asketh him whence he cometh, and he saith, 'Sir, from towards Cardoil. Kay the Seneschal, with two other knights, is leading away Messire Ywain li Aoutres toward the castle of the Hard Rock. I thought to help to rescue him, but they have wounded me in such sort as you see.' 'Are they ever so far away?' saith Lancelot. 'Sir, they will pass just now at the head of this forest; and so you are fain to go thither, I will return with you right willingly and help you to the best I may.' Lancelot smiteth his horse with the spurs forthwith, and the knight after him, and espieth Kay the Seneschal, that was bringing Messire Ywain along at a great pace, and

had set him upon a trotting hackney, for so he thought that none would know him. Lancelot overtaketh him and crieth, 'By my head, Kay the Seneschal, shame had you enough of that you did to King Arthur when you slew his son, and as much more ought you now to have of thus warring upon him again!' He smiteth his horse of his spurs, lance in rest, and Kay the Seneschal turneth toward him, and they mell together with their spears on their shields, and pierce them in such sort that an ells-length of each shaft passeth through beyond. **Ywain li Aoutres**

XIV

The lances were strong so as that they brast not. They draw them back to themselves so stoutly and come together so fiercely that their horses stagger and they lose the stirrups. Lancelot catcheth Kay the Seneschal at the passing beyond, in the midst of the breast, and thrusteth his spear into him so far that the point remained in the flesh, and Kay to-brast his own; and sore grieved was he when he felt himself wounded. The knight that was wounded overthrew one of the two knights. Kay is on the ground, and Lancelot taketh his horse and setteth Messire Ywain li Aoutres thereupon, that was right sore wounded so as that he scarce might bear it. Kay the Seneschal maketh his knight remount, and holdeth his sword grasped in his fist as though he had been stark wood. Lancelot seeth the two knights sore badly wounded, and thinketh that and he stay longer

Kay and Briant

they may remain on the field. He maketh them go before him, and Kay the Seneschal followeth them behind, himself the third knight, that is right wroth of the wound he feeleth and the blood that he seeth. Lancelot bringeth off his knights like as the wild-boar goeth among the dogs, and Kay dealeth him great buffets of his sword when he may catch him, and Lancelot him again, and so they depart, fencing in such sort.

XV

When Kay the Seneschal seeth that he may not harm him, he turneth him back, full of great wrath, and his heart pricketh to avenge him thereof and he may get at him, for he is the knight of the court that most he hateth. He is come back to the Castle of the Hard Rock. Briant of the Isles asketh him who hath wounded him in such sort, and he telleth him that he was bringing thither Ywain li Aoutres when Lancelot rescued him. 'And the King,' saith Briant, 'Is he repaired thither?' 'I have heard no tidings of him at all,' saith Kay, 'For no leisure had I to ask of any.' Briant and his knights take much thought as concerning Lancelot's coming, for they are well persuaded that Lancelot hath come for that the King is dead and Messire Gawain, whereof they make right great joy. Kay the Seneschal maketh him be disarmed and his wound searched. They tell him he need not fear it shall be his death, but that he is right sore wounded.

XVI

Lancelot at Cardoil

Lancelot is entered into the castle of Cardoil, and his wounded knights withal, and findeth the folk in sore dismay. Great dole make they in many places and much lamentation for King Arthur, and say that now nevermore may they look for succour to none, and he be dead and Messire Gawain. But they give Lancelot joy of that he hath rescued Messire Ywain li Aoutres, and were so somewhat comforted and made great cheer. The tidings thereof came to the knights that were in the castle, and they all come forward to meet him save they that were wounded, and so led him up to the castle, and Messire Ywain with him and the other knight that was wounded. All the knights of the castle were right glad, and ask him tidings of King Arthur, and whether he were dead or no. And Lancelot telleth them that he was departed from him at the Palace Meadow, where he won the white destrier and the crown of gold there where the tidings were brought to him that Queen Guinievre was dead.

XVII

'Then you tell us of a truth that the King is on live, and Messire Gawain?' 'Both, you may be certain!' saith Lancelot. Thereupon were they gladder than before. They told him of their own mischance, how Briant of the Isles had put them to the worse, and how Kay the Seneschal was with him to do them hurt. For he it is that taketh most pains to do them evil. 'By

Meliant of Waste Manor

my head,' saith Lancelot, 'Kay the Seneschal ought of right to take heed and with-hold him from doing you ill, but he departed from the field with the point of my spear in him when I rescued Messire Ywain.'

XVIII

The knights are much comforted of the coming of Lancelot, but he is much grieved that he findeth so many of them wounded. Meliant of the Waste Manor is at the castle of the Hard Rock, and good fellow is it betwixt him and Kay the Seneschal. He is right glad of the tidings he hath heard, that Lancelot is come, and saith that he is the knight of the world that most he hateth, and that he will avenge him of his father and he may meet him. There come before the castle of Cardoil one day threescore knights armed, and they seize upon their booty betwixt the castle and the forest. Lancelot issueth forth, all armed, and seven of the best of the castle with him. He cometh upon them after that they have led away their plunder. He overtaketh one knight and smiteth him with his spear right through the body, and the other knights make an onset upon the others and many to-brake their spears, and much clashing was there of steel on armour; and there fell at the assembly on one side and the other full a score knights, whereof some were wounded right sore. Meliant of the Waste Manor espied Lancelot, and right great joy made he of seeing him, and smiteth him so stout a buffet on the shield that he to-breaketh his spear.

XIX

fighteth Lancelot

Lancelot smiteth him amidst the breast so grimly that he maketh him bend backwards over the saddle behind, and so beareth him to the ground, legs uppermost, over his horse croup, and trampleth him under his horse's feet. Lancelot was minded to alight to the ground to take him, but Briant of the Isles cometh and maketh him mount again perforce. The numbers grew on the one side and the other of knights that came from Cardoil and from the Hard Rock. Right great was the frushing of lances and the clashing of swords and the overthrow of horses and knights. Briant of the Isles and Lancelot come against each other so stoutly that they pierce their shields and cleave their habergeons, and they thrust with their spears so that the flesh is broken under the ribs and the shafts are all-to-splintered. They hurtle against each other so grimly at the by-passing that their eyes sparkle as it were of stars in their heads, and the horses stagger under them. They hold their swords drawn, and so return the one toward the other like lions. Such buffets deal they upon their helms that they beat them in and make the fire leap out by the force of the smiting of iron by steel. And Meliant cometh all armed toward Lancelot to aid Briant of the Isles, but Lucan the Butler cometh to meet him, and smiteth him with his spear so stoutly that he thrusteth it right through his shield and twisteth his arm against his side. He breaketh his spear at the by-passing, and

Briant and Lancelot

Meliant also breaketh his, but he was wounded passing sore.

XX

Thereupon he seizeth him by the bridle and thinketh to lead him away, but the knights and the force of Briant rescue him. The clashing of arms lasted great space betwixt Briant of the Isles and Lancelot, and each was mightily wrath for that each was wounded. Either seized other many times by the bridle, and each was right fain to lead the other to his own hold, but the force of knights on the one side and the other disparted them asunder. Thus the stour lasted until evening, until that the night sundered them. But Briant had nought to boast of at departing, for Lancelot and his men carried off four of his by force right sore wounded, besides them that remained dead on the field. Briant of the Isles and Meliant betook them back all sorrowful for their knights that are taken and dead. Lancelot cometh back to Cardoil, and they of the castle make him right great joy of the knights that they bring taken, and say that the coming of the good knight Lancelot should be great comfort to them until such time as King Arthur should repair back and Messire Gawain. The wounded knights that were in the castle turned to healing of their wounds, whereof was Lancelot right glad. They were as many as five and thirty within the castle. Of all the King's knights were there no more save Lancelot and the wounded knight that he brought along with him.

BRANCH XXV

TITLE I

HERE the story is silent of Lancelot and the knights that are at Cardoil, and saith that King Arthur and Messire Gawain are in the castle where the priest told Messire Gawain how he was born. But they cannot depart thence at their will, for Ahuret the Bastard that was brother of Nabigant of the Rock, that Messire Gawain slew on account of Meliot of Logres, knoweth well that they are therewithin, and hath assembled his knights and holdeth them within so strait that they may not depart without sore damage. For he hath on the outer side a full great plenty of knights, and the King and Messire Gawain have with them but only five of the forest and the country that are upon their side, and they hold them so strait within that they may not issue out from thence; yea, the brother of Nabigant sweareth that they shall not depart thence until such time as he shall have taken Messire Gawain, and taken vengeance on his fellow of his brother whom he slew. The King saith to Messire Gawain that he hath much shame of this that they are so long shut up therewithin, and that he better loveth to die with honour than to live with shame within the castle. So they issued forth, spears in rest, and Ahuret and his knights,

Arthur and Gawain

Ahuret the Bastard whereof was there great plenty, made much joy thereat.

II

The King and Messire Gawain strike among them, and each overthroweth his man; but Ahuret hath great shame of this that he seeth his knights put to the worse by so few folk. He setteth his spear in rest and smiteth one of King Arthur's knights through the body and beareth him down dead. Then returneth he to Messire Gawain, and buffeteth him so strongly that he pierceth his shield, but he maketh drop his own spear and loseth his stirrups, and Messire Gawain waxeth wroth and smiteth him so grimly and with such force that he maketh him bend back over the hinder bow of his saddle. But Ahuret was strong and of great might, and leapeth back between the bows and cometh toward King Arthur that he saw before him, but he knew him not. He left Messire Gawain, and the King smiteth him with such a sweep that he cutteth off his arm, spear and all. There was great force of knights, so that they ran upon them on all sides; and never would they have departed thence sound and whole, but that thereupon Meliot of Logres cometh thither with fifteen knights, for that he had heard tidings of Messire Gawain, how he was besieged in a castle there, where he and King Arthur between them were in such plight that they had lost their five knights, so that they were not but only two that defended themselves as best they might, as they that had no thought

but to remain there, for the odds of two knights against thirty was too great. Meliot of Logres

III

Thereupon, behold you, Meliot of Logres with fifteen knights, and they come thither where the King and Messire Gawain are in such jeopardy, and they strike so stoutly among them that they rescue King Arthur and Messire Gawain from them that had taken them by the bridle, and so slay full as many as ten of them, and put the others to flight, and lead away their lord sore maimed. And Messire Gawain giveth Meliot much thanks of the bounty he hath done, whereby he hath saved them their lives; and he giveth him the castle, and is fain that he hold it of him, for in no place might he have better employment, and that well hath he deserved it of his service in such need. Meliot thanketh him much, and prayeth Messire Gawain instantly that and he shall have need of succour he will come to aid him, in like manner as he would do by him everywhere. And Messire Gawain telleth him that as of this needeth him not to make prayer, for that he is one of the knights of the world that most he ought of right to love. The King and Messire Gawain take leave of Meliot, and so depart, and Meliot garnisheth the castle that was right fair and rich and well-seated.

BRANCH XXVI

TITLE I

Arthur at Avalon

OF Meliot the story is here silent, and saith that King Arthur and Messire Gawain have ridden so far that they are come into the Isle of Avalon, there where the Queen lieth. They lodge the night with the hermits, that make them right great cheer. But you may well say that the King is no whit joyful when he seeth the coffin where the Queen lieth and that wherein the head of his son lieth. Thereof is his dole renewed, and he saith that this holy place of this holy chapel ought he of right to love better than all other places on earth. They depart on the morrow when they have heard mass. The King goeth the quickest he may toward Cardoil, and findeth the land wasted and desolate in many places, whereof is he right sorrowful, and understandeth that Kay the Seneschal warreth upon him with the others. He marvelleth much how he durst do it. He is come to Cardoil. When they of the castle know it they come to meet him with right great cheer. The tidings went throughout all the land, and they of the country were right joyous thereof, for the more part believed that he was dead. They of the castle of the Hard Rock knew it, but little rejoiced they thereat. But Kay the Seneschal was whole of his wound and

bethought him that great folly would he do to remain longer there to war upon the King, for well knew he that and the King held him and did that which he had proclaimed, his end were come. He departeth from the castle, where he had sojourned of a long while, and crossed again stealthily over-sea, and came into Little Britain, and made fast a castle for fear of the King, that is called Chinon, and was there long time, without the King warring upon him, for enough adventures had he in other parts. Arthur at Cardoil

II

To Cardoil was the King repaired and Messire Gawain. You may well understand that the land was much rejoiced thereof, and that all the knights were greatly comforted, and knights came back to the court from all parts. They that had been wounded were whole again. Briant of the Isles stinted not of his pride nor of his outrage, but rather stirred up the war the most he might, he and Meliant still more, and said that never would he cease therefrom until death, nor never would he have rest until such time as he should have vengeance of Lancelot. The King was one day at Cardoil at meat, and there was in the hall great throng of knights, and Messire Gawain sate beside the King. Lancelot sate at the table, and Messire Ywain the son of King Urien, and Sagramors li Desirous, and Ywain li Aoutres, and many more other knights round about the table, but there were not so many as there wont to be. Messire Lucan the Butler

Madeglant of Oriande

served before the King of the golden cup. The King looked round about the table and remembered him of the Queen. He was bent upon thinking rather than on eating, and saw that his court was much wasted and worsened of her death. And what time the King was musing in such sort, behold you a knight come into the hall all armed before the King; and he leaneth on the staff of his spear. 'Sir,' saith the knight, 'Listen, so please you, to me, and all these others, listen! Madeglant of Oriande sendeth me here to you, and commandeth that you yield up the Table Round to him, for sith that the Queen is dead, you have no right thereof, for he is her next of kin and he that hath the best right to have and to hold it; and, so you do not this, you he defieth as the man that disheriteth him, for he is your enemy in two manner of ways, for the Table Round that you hold by wrong, and for the New Law that you hold. But he sendeth you word by me, that so you will renounce your belief and take Queen Jandree his sister, that he will cry you quit as of the Table Round and will be of your aid everywhere. But and if you do not this, have never affiance in him. And so sendeth he word to you by me!'

III

Therewith the knight departeth, and the King remaineth all heavy in thought, and when they had eaten, he rose from the tables and all the knights. He speaketh to Messire Gawain and Lancelot, and taketh counsel with all the

others. 'Sir,' saith Messire Gawain, 'You will defend yourself the best you may, and we will help you to smite your enemies. Great Britain is all at your will. You have not as yet lost any castle. Nought hath been broken down nor burnt but open ground and cottages and houses, whereof is no great harm done to yourself, and the shame thereof may lightly be amended. King Madeglant is of great hardiment as of words, but in arms will he not vanquish you so soon. If that he warreth upon you toward the West, send thither one of the best knights of your court that may maintain the war and defend the land against him.' Of King Arthur

IV

The King sojourned at Cardoil of a long space. He believed in God and His sweet Mother right well. He brought thither from the castle where the Graal was the pattern whereby chalices should be made, and commanded make them throughout all the land so as that the Saviour of the world should be served more worshipfully. He commanded also that bells be cast throughout his land after the fashion of the one he had brought, and that each church should have one according to the means thereof. This much pleased the people of his kingdom, for thereby was the land somewhat amended. The tidings came to him one day that Briant and Meliant were riding through his land with great routs of folk, and were minded to assiege Pannenoisance; and the King issued forth of Cardoil with great

Meliant throng of knights all armed, and rode until he espied Briant and his people, and Briant him again. They ranged their battles on both sides, and came together with such might and so great a shock as that it seemed the earth shook; and they melled together at the assembly with their spears so passing grimly as that the frushing thereof might be heard right far away. Some fourteen fell in the assembly that rose up again never more. Meliant of the Waste Manor searcheth for Lancelot in the midst of the stour until he findeth him, and runneth upon him right sturdily and pierceth his shield with his spear. Lancelot smiteth him such a sweep amidst the breast, that he thrusteth his spear right through his shoulder, and pinneth him so strongly that the shaft is all to-brast, and the end thereof remaineth in his body. And Meliant, all stricken through as he is, runneth upon him and passeth his spear right through the shield and through the arm, in such sort that he pinneth it to his side. He passeth beyond and breaketh his spear, and afterward returneth to Lancelot, sword in fist, and dealeth him a buffet on the helm so grimly that he all to-battered it in. Lancelot waxeth right wroth thereof, and he grieveth the more for that he feeleth him wounded. He cometh toward Meliant, sword drawn, and holding him well under cover of his shield and cover of his helm, and smiteth Meliant so fiercely that he cleaveth his shoulder down to the rib in such sort that the end of the spear wherewith he had pierced

Meliant and Lancelot

him fell out therefrom. Meliant felt himself wounded to the death, and draweth him back all sorrowful, and other knights run upon Lancelot and deliver assault. Messire Ywain and Sagramors li Desirous and Messire Gawain were on the other side in great jeopardy, for the people of Briant of the Isles came from all parts, and waxed more and more, and on all sides the greater number of knights had the upper hand therein. King Arthur and Briant of the Isles were in the midst of the battle, and dealt each other right great buffets. Briant's people come thither and take King Arthur by the bridle, and the King defendeth himself as a good knight, and maketh a ring about him amongst them that attack him, the same as doth a wild boar amongst the dogs. Messire Ywain is come thither and Lucan the Butler, and break through the press by force. Thereupon, behold you Sagramors li Desirous, that cometh as fast as his horse may gallop under him, and smiteth Briant of the Isles right before his people with such a rush that he beareth him to the ground in a heap, both him and his horse. Briant to-brast his thigh bone in the fall that he made. Sagramors holdeth sword drawn and would fain have thrust it into his body, when the King crieth to him that he slay him not.

Briant sore hurt

v

Briant's people were not able to succour their lord. Nay, rather, they drew back on all sides, for the stour had lasted of a long space. So

Meliant dieth

they tended the dead and the wounded, of whom were enough on one side and the other. King Arthur made carry Briant of the Isles to Cardoil, and bring along the other knights that his own knights had taken. Right joyous were the folks at Cardoil when the King came back. They bore Meliant of the Waste Manor on his shield to the Hard Rock, but he scarce lived after. The King made Briant of the Isles be healed, and held him in prison of a long while, until Briant gave him surety of all his lands and became his man. The King made him Seneschal of all his lands, and Briant served him right well.

VI

Lancelot was whole of his wound, and all the knights of theirs. King Arthur was safely stablished, and redoubted and dreaded of all lands and of his own land like as he wont to be. Briant hath forgotten all that is past, and is obedient to the King's commands, and more privy is he of his counsel than ever another of the knights, insomuch that he put the others somewhat back, whereof had they much misliking. The felony of Kay the Seneschal lay very nigh the King's heart, and he said that and any would take vengeance upon him for the same, greatly would he love him thereof, for so disloyally hath he wrought against him that he durst not let the matter be slurred over; and a sore misfortune is it for the world when a man of so poor estate hath slain so high a man as his son for no misdeed, and that strangers ought by

as good right as they that knew him or himself take vengeance upon him thereof, so that others might be adread of doing such disloyalty. Queen Jandree

VII

Briant was feared and redoubted throughout all Great Britain. King Arthur had told them that they were all to be at his commandment. And one day while the King was at Cardoil, behold you! a damsel that cometh into the hall and saith to him: 'Sir, Queen Jandree hath sent me over to you, and biddeth you do that whereof her brother sent you word by his knight. She is minded to be Lady and Queen of your land, and that you take her to wife, for of high lineage is she and of great power, wherefore she biddeth you by me that you renounce the New Law and that you believe in the God in whom she believeth, and, so you do not this, you may not have affiance in your land, for King Madeglant hath as now made ready his host to enter into the chief of your land, and hath sworn his oath that he will not end until he shall have passed all the borders of the isles that march upon your land, and shall come upon Great Britain with all his strength, and so seize the Table Round that ought to be his own of right. And my Lady herself would come hither but for one thing, to wit, that she hath in her such disdain of them that believe in the New Law, that she deigneth not behold none of them, for, so soon as she was stablished Queen, made she her eyes be covered for that she would not look upon none that were of that believe.

Jandree's message But the Gods wherein she believeth did so much for her, for that she loveth and worshippeth them, that she may discover her eyes and her face, and yet see not at all, whereof is she right glad, for that the eyes in her head are beautiful and gentle. But great affiance hath she in her brother, that is mighty and puissant, for he hath her in covenant that he will destroy all them that believe in the New Law, in all places where he may get at them, and, when he shall have destroyed them in Great Britain and the other islands, so that my Lady might not see none therein, so well is she with the Gods wherein she believeth, that she will have her sight again all whole, nor until that hour is she fain to see nought.'

VIII

'Damsel,' saith the King, 'I have heard well that which you tell me of this that you have in charge to say; but tell your Lady on my behalf, that the Law which the Saviour of the world hath established by His death and by His crucifixion never will I renounce, for the love that I have in Him. But tell her that she believe in God and in His sweet Mother, and that she believe in the New Law, for by the false believe wherein she abideth is she blinded in such sort, nor never will she see clear until she believe in God. Tell her moreover, I send her word that never more shall there be Queen in my land save she be of like worth as was Queen Guenievre.' 'Then I tell you plainly,' saith she, 'that you will have betimes such

tidings as that good for you they will not be.' of defiance
The damsel departeth from Cardoil, and cometh back to where the Queen was, and telleth her the message King Arthur sendeth her. 'True,' saith she, 'I love him better than all in the world, and yet refuseth he my will and my commandment. Now may he no longer endure!' She sendeth to her brother King Madeglant, and telleth him that she herself doth defy him and he take not vengeance on King Arthur and bring him not into prison.

BRANCH XXVII

TITLE I

King Madeglant

THIS history saith that the land of this King was full far away from the land of King Arthur, and that needs must he pass two seas or ever he should approach the first head of King Arthur's land. He arrived in Albanie with great force of men with a great navy. When they of the land knew it, they garnished them against him and defended their lands the best they might; then they sent word to King Arthur that King Madeglant was come in such manner into the land, with great plenty of folk, and that he should come presently to succour them or send them a knight so good as that he might protect them, and that in case he doth not so, the land will be lost. When King Arthu. understood these tidings, it was not well with him. He asked his knights whom he migh' send thither. And they say, let him sena Lancelot thither, for that he is a worthy knight and a kingly, and much understandeth of war, and hath in him as much loyalty as hath ever another that they know. The King maketh him come before him.

II

'Lancelot,' saith the King, 'Such affiance have I in you and in your knighthood, that it is

my will to send you to the furthest corner of my land, to protect it, with the approval of my knights, wherefore I pray and require you that you do your power herein as many a time have you done already in my service. And I will give you in command forty knights.' 'Sir,' saith Lancelot, 'Against your will am I not minded to be, but in your court are there other knights full as good, or better than I, whom you might well send thither. But I would not that you should hold this of cowardize in me, and right willingly will I do your pleasure, for none ought I to serve more willingly than you.' The King giveth him much thanks of this that he saith. Lancelot departeth from the court, and taketh forty knights with him, and so cometh into the land of Albanie where King Madeglant hath arrived. When they of the land knew that Lancelot was come, great joy had they thereof in their hearts, for ofttimes had they heard tell of him and of his good knighthood. They were all at his commandment, and received him as their champion and protector.

Lancelot goeth forth

III

King Madeglant one day issued forth of his ships to do battle against Lancelot and them of the land. Lancelot received him right stoutly, and slew many of his folk, and the more part fled and would fain have drawn them to their ships, but Lancelot and his people went after and cut a part of them to pieces. King Madeglant, with as many of his men as he might, betaketh himself to his own ship privily,

Madeglant is defeated

and maketh put to sea the soonest he may. They that might not come to the ships remained on dry land, and were so cut up and slain. Madeglant went his way discomfited. Of ten ships full of men that he had brought he took back with him but two. The land was in peace and assured in safety. Lancelot remained there of a long space. They of the country loved him much and gave themselves great joy of his valour and his great bounty, insomuch that most of them say ofttimes that they would fain have such a knight as was he for king, by the goodwill of King Arthur, for that the land is too far away; but and if he would set there a knight or other man that might protect the land, they would take it in right good part, and he should hold the land of him, for they might not safeguard it at their will without a champion, for that land without a lord may but little avail. They of the land loved Lancelot well, as I tell you. King Arthur was at Cardoil, and so were his knights together with him. He thought to be assured in his kingdom and to live peaceably; but what time he sate at meat one day in Cardoil, behold you thereupon a knight that cometh before the Table Round without saluting him. 'Sir,' saith he, 'Where is Lancelot?' 'Sir,' saith the King to the knight, 'He is not in this country.' 'By my head,' saith the knight, 'that misliketh me. Wheresoever he be, he is your knight and of your household; wherefore King Claudas sendeth you word that he is his mortal enemy, and you also, if so be that for love of him you receive him from

this day forward, for he hath slain his sister's son, Meliant of the Waste Manor, and he slew the father of Meliant likewise, but the father belongeth not to King Claudas. **Claudas defieth Arthur**

IV

'Meliant was the son of his sister-german, wherefore much grieveth he of his death.' 'Sir knight,' saith the King, 'I know not how the covenant may be between them as of this that you tell me, but well know I that King Claudas holdeth many a castle that King Claudas ought not of right to have, whereof he disherited his father, but meet is it that each should conquer his own right. But so much I tell you plainly, that never will I fail mine own knight and he be such as durst defend himself of murder, but and if he hath no will to do this, then well may I allow that right be done upon him. But, sith that he will not love his own death, neither I nor other ought greatly to love him and he refuse to redress his wrong. When Lancelot shall know these tidings, I know well that such is his valour and his loyalty that he will readily answer in reason, and will do all that he ought to do to clear himself of such a charge.' 'Sir,' saith the knight, 'You have heard well that I have told you. Once more, I tell you plainly, King Claudas sendeth you word that so you harbour his enemy henceforward and in such manner as you have done heretofore, he will be less than pleased with you.'

A council of knights

V

With that the knight departeth, and the King remaineth at Cardoil. He sendeth for Briant of the Isles, his seneschal, and a great part of his knights, and demandeth counsel of them what he may do. Messire Ywain saith that he killed Meliant in the King's service, as one that warred upon his land, albeit the King had done him no wrong, and had so made common cause with the King's enemies without demanding right in his court. Nor never had Meliant appealed Lancelot of murder nor of treason, nor required him of the death of his father. Rather, Lancelot slew him in open war, as one that warred upon his lord by wrong. Sir,' saith Messire Ywain to the King, 'Howsoever Lancelot might have wrought in respect of Meliant, your land ought not to be called to account, for you were not in the kingdom, nor knew not that either had done other any wrong, and therefore say I that King Claudas will do great wrong and he bring plaint or levy war against you on this account.' 'Messire Ywain,' saith Briant of the Isles, 'matter of common knowledge is it that Lancelot slew the lord of the Waste Manor and Meliant his son after the contention that was betwixt King Arthur and me. But, after that he had slain the father, he ought of right to have taken good heed that he did no wrong to the son, but rather ought he to have sought peace and accord.'

VI

Wrathful debate

'Briant,' saith Messire Gawain, 'Lancelot is not here; and, moreover, he is now on the King's business. Well know you that Meliant came to you and that you made him knight, and that thereafter he warred upon the King's land without reasonable occasion. The King was far away from the land as he that made pilgrimage to the Graal. He was told tidings that his land was being put to the worse, and he sent Lancelot to protect it. He accordingly maintained the war as best he might until such time as the King was returned. Meliant knew well that the King was come back, and that never had he done wrong to none in his court that wished to demand right therein. He neither came thither nor sent, either to do right or to demand right, whether he did so for despite or whether it was for that he knew not how to do it. In the meanwhile he warred upon the King, that had never done him a wrong nor refused to do him a right. Lancelot slew him in the King's war and upon his land in defence thereof. There was peace of the war, as was agreed on between you and the King, but and if any should therefore hold Lancelot to blame of the death of Meliant, meseemeth that therein is he wrong. For the others are not held to answer for them that they slew; but and if you wish to say that Lancelot hath not slain him with reason, howsoever he may have wrought aforetime in respect of his father, I am ready to maintain his right by my body on behalf of his.'

Briant's craven counsel

VII

'Messire Gawain,' saith Briant of the Isles, 'You will not as at this time find none that will take up your gage on account of this affair, nor ought any to make enemies of his friends, nor ought you to counsel me so to do. King Madeglant warreth upon him and King Claudas maketh war upon him also. They will deliver attacks enough. But I should well allow, for the sake of saving his land and keeping his friends, that the King should suffer Lancelot to remain at a distance from his court for one year, until tidings should have come to King Claudas that he had been bidden leave thereof, so as that King Arthur might have his good will and his love.' Sagramors li Desirous leapeth forward. 'Briant of the Isles,' saith Sagramors, 'Ill befall him that shall give such counsel to a lord of his knight, and the knight have well served his lord, albeit he may have slain in his wars a knight without murder and without treason, that he should give him his leave! Right ill will Lancelot hitherto have bestowed his services, and the King on this account give him his leave! After that, let King Claudas come! Let him lay waste and slay, and right great worship shall King Arthur have thereof! I say not this for that Lancelot hath need be afeared of King Claudas body to body, nor of the best knight in his land, but many things befall whereof one taketh no heed; and so King Arthur give leave to Lancelot from his court, it will be counted unto him for

cowardize, and neither I nor you nor other knight ought never more to have affiance in him.' 'Lord,' saith Briant of the Isles, 'Better would it avail the King to give Lancelot leave for one year, than it would to fight for him ten years and have his land wasted and put to the worse.' Angry words

VIII

Thereupon, behold you! Orguelleux of the Launde come, that had not been at the court of a long time, and it had been told him whereof these words were. 'Briant,' saith Orguelleux of the Launde, 'Evil fare the knight that would fain grieve and harm with their lord them that have served him well! Sith that Lancelot is not here, say nought of him that ought not to be said. The court of King Arthur hath been as much renowned and made honoured by Lancelot as by ever another knight that is in it, and, but for him, never would his court have been so redoubted as it is. For no knight is there so cruel to his foes nor so redoubted throughout all Great Britain as is Lancelot, and, for that King Arthur loveth you, make him not that he hate his knights, for such four or such six be there in his castle as may depart therefrom without returning, the loss whereof should scarce be made good by us. Lancelot hath well served the King aforetime, and the King well knoweth how much he is worth; and if so be that King Claudas purposeth to war on King Arthur for Lancelot's sake, according as I have heard,

Orgueleux his counsel

without any reason, and King Arthur be not more craven than he wont to be, he may well abide his warfare and his strife so treason harm him not. For so many good knights hath King Arthur yet, that none knoweth such knights nor such King in the world beside.'

BRANCH XXVIII

TITLE I

THIS story saith that Briant would have been wroth with a will against Orguelleux of the Launde, had it not been for the King, and Orguelleux against him, for Orguelleux heeded no danger when anger and ill-will carried him away. Therewithal the talk came to an end. When the King learnt the tidings that Madeglant was discomfited and that the land of Albanie was in peace, he sent word to Lancelot to return back. They of the land were very sorrowful when he departed, for great affiance had they in his chivalry. So he came back thither where King Arthur was. All they of the land made great joy, for well loved was he of many, nor were there none that hated him save of envy alone. They told him the tidings of King Claudas, and also in what manner Briant had spoken. Lancelot took no notice outwardly, as he that well knew how to redress all his grievances. He was at the court of a long while, for that King Claudas was about to send over thither some one of his knights. Briant of the Isles would fain that the King should have given him his leave, for more he hated him than ever another knight in the court, sith he it was that many a time had harmed him more than any other. By Briant's counsel, King Claudas sent

Lancelot returneth

Briant is defeated

his knight to King Arthur's court, wherein did he not wisely, for that he thereby renewed a matter whereof afterward came right great mischief, as this title witnesseth.

II

Madeglant of Oriande heard say that Lancelot was repaired back, and that the land of Albanie was all void save for the folk of the country. He maketh ready his navy at once and cometh back to the land in great force. He burneth the land and layeth it waste on every side, and doth far worse therein than he did aforetime. They of the land sent over to King Arthur and told him of their evil plight, warning him that, and he send them not succour betimes, they will leave the land and yield up the castles, for that they might not hold them longer. He took counsel, the King with his knights, whom he might send thither, and they said that Lancelot had already been there and that now another knight should be sent thither. The King sent thither Briant of the Isles, and lent him forty knights. Briant, that loved not the King in his heart, came into the land, but only made pretence of helping him to defend it. One day fell out a battle betwixt Madeglant and Briant and all their men. Briant was discomfited, and had many of his knights killed. Madeglant and his people spread themselves over the land and laid the towns in ruins and destroyed the castles, that were disgarnished, and put to death all them that would not believe in their gods, and cut off their heads.

III

A golden quarrel

All they of the land and country longed with sorrow for Lancelot, and said that had he remained there, the land would not have been thus destroyed, nor might they never have protection of no knight but of him alone. Briant of the Isles returned back, as he that would the war against King Arthur should increase on every side, for, what good soever the King may do him, he loveth him not, nor never will so long as he is on live. But no semblant thereof durst he show, for, sith that the best of his knights had been slain in the battle, so had he no power on his side, as against Lancelot and the good knights of his fellowship, whereof he would fain that there had been not one.

IV

King Arthur was at Cardoil on one day of Whitsuntide. Many were the knights that were come to this court whereof I tell you. The King was seated at meat, and the day was fair and clear, and the air clean and fresh. Sagramors li Desirous and Lucan the Butler served before the King. And what time they had served of the first meats, therewithal behold you, a quarrel, like as it had been shot from a cross-bow, and striketh in the column of the hall before the King so passing strong that there was not a knight in the hall but heard it when it struck therein. They all looked thereat in great wonderment. The quarrel was like as it were of gold, and it had about it a many costly

A damsel's request

precious stones. The King saith that quarrel so costly cometh not from a poor place. Lancelot and Messire Gawain say that never have they seen one so rich. It struck so deep in the column that the iron point thereof might not be seen, and a good part of the shaft was also hidden. Thereupon, behold you, a damsel of surpassing great beauty that cometh, sitting on a right costly mule, full well caparisoned. She had a gilded bridle and gilded saddle, and was clad in a right rich cloth of silk. A squire followed after her that drove her mule from behind. She came before King Arthur as straight as she might, and saluted him right worshipfully, and he made answer the best he might. 'Sir,' saith she, 'I am come to speak and demand a boon, nor will I never alight until such time as you shall have granted it to me. For such is my custom, and for this am I come to your court, whereof I have heard such tidings and such witness in many places where I have been, that I know you will not deny me herein.'

V

'Damsel, tell me what boon you would have of me?' 'Sir,' saith she, 'I would fain pray and beseech you that you bid the knight that may draw forth this quarrel from this column go thither where there is sore need of him.' 'Damsel,' saith the King, 'Tell me the need.' 'Sir,' saith she, 'I will tell it you plainly when I shall see the knight that shall have drawn it forth.' 'Damsel,' saith the King, 'Alight!

Never, please God, shall you go forth of my court denied of that you ask.' Lucan the Butler taketh her between his arms and setteth her to the ground, and her mule is led away to be stabled. When the damsel had washen, she was set in a seat beside Messire Ywain, that showed her much honour and served her with a good will. He looked at her from time to time, for she was fair and gentle and of good countenance. When they had eaten at the tables, the damsel prayeth the King that he will hasten them to do her business. 'Sir,' saith she, 'Many a good knight is there within yonder, and right glad may he be that shall draw it forth, for I tell you a right good knight is he, sith that none may achieve this business save he alone.' 'Fair nephew,' saith the King, 'Now set your hand to this quarrel and give it back to the damsel.' 'Ha, sir,' saith he, 'Do me not shame! By the faith that I owe you, I will not set my hand forward herein this day, nor ought you to be wroth hereof. Behold, here have you Lancelot with you, and so many other good knights, that little worship should I have herein were I to set myself forward before them.' 'Messire Ywain,' saith the King, 'Set your hand hereto! It may be that you think too humbly of yourself herein.' 'Sir,' saith Messire Ywain, 'Nought is there in the world that I would not do for you, but as for this matter I pray you hold me excused.' 'Sagramors, and you, Orguelleux of the Launde, what will you do?' saith the King. 'Sir,' say they, 'When

Excuses pleaded

Lancelot essayeth

Lancelot hath made assay, we will do your pleasure, but before him, so please you, we will not go.'

VI

'Damsel,' saith the King, 'Pray Lancelot that he be fain to set his hand, and then the rest shall go after him if needs be.' 'Lancelot,' saith the damsel, 'By the thing that most you love, make not mine errand bootless, but set your hand to the quarrel and then will the others do that they ought of right to do. For no leisure have I to tarry here long time.' 'Damsel,' saith Lancelot, 'Ill do you, and a sin, to conjure me for nought, for so many good knights be here within, that I should be held for a fool and a braggart and I put myself forward before all other.' 'By my head,' saith the King, 'Not so! Rather will you be held as a knight courteous and wise and good, as now you ought to be, and great worship will it be to yourself and you may draw forth the quarrel, and great courtesy will it be to aid the damsel. Wherefore I require you, of the faith you owe me, that you set your hand thereto, sith that the damsel prayeth you so to do, before the others.'

VII

Lancelot hath no mind to disobey the King's commandment; and he remembered that the damsel had conjured him by the thing that most he loved; nor was there nought in the world that he loved so much as the Queen,

albeit she was dead, nor never thought he of none other thing save her alone. Then standeth he straight upright, doth off his robe, and cometh straight to the quarrel that is fixed in the column. He setteth his hand thereunto and draweth it forth with a right passing strong wrench, so sturdily that he maketh the column tremble. Then he giveth it to the damsel. 'Sir,' saith she to King Arthur, 'Now is it my devoir to tell you plainly of my errand; nor might none of the knights here within have drawn forth the quarrel save only he; and you held me in covenant how he that should draw it forth should do that which I shall require of him, and that he might do it, nor will I pray nor require of him nought that is not reason. Needs must he go to the Chapel Perilous the swiftest he may, and there will he find a knight that lieth shrouded in the midst of the chapel: He will take of the cloth wherein he is shrouded and a sword that lieth at his side in the coffin, and will take them to the Castle Perilous; and when he shall there have been, he shall return to the castle where he slew the lion in the cavern wherein are the two griffons, and the head of one of them shall he take and bring to me at Castle Perilous, for a knight there lieth sick that may not otherwise be healed.' The Chapel Perilous

VIII

'Damsel,' saith Lancelot, 'I see that you reckon but little of my life, so only that your wish be accomplished.' 'Sir,' saith she, 'I

Lancelot goeth forth

know as well as you what the enterprise is, nor do I no whit desire your death, for, and were you dead, never would the knight be whole for whose sake you undertake it. And you will see the fairest damsel that is in any kingdom, and the one that most desireth to see you. And, so you tarry not, through her shall you lightly get done that you have to do. See now that you delay it not, but do that is needful swiftly sith that it hath been laid upon you, for the longer you tarry, the greater will be the hazard of mischance befalling you.' The damsel departeth from the court and taketh her leave and goeth her way back as fast as she may, and saith to herself: 'Lancelot, albeit you have these pains and this travail for me, yet would I not your death herein, but of right ought I to rejoice in your tribulation, for into two of the most perilous places in the world are you going. Greatly ought I to hate you, for you reft me of my friend and gave him to another, and while I live may I never forget it.' The damsel goeth her way, and Lancelot departeth from the court and taketh leave of the King and of all the others. He issueth forth of Cardoil, all armed, and entereth into the forest that is deep, and so goeth forth a great pace, and prayeth God guide him into safety.

BRANCH XXIX

TITLE I

THEREWITHAL the story is silent of Lancelot, and saith that Briant of the Isles is repaired to Cardoil. Of the forty knights that he took with him, but fifteen doth he bring back again. Thereof is King Arthur right sorrowful, and saith that he hath the fewer friends. They of the land of Albanie have sent to King Arthur and told him that and he would not lose the land for evermore he must send them Lancelot, for never saw they knight that better knew how to avenge him on his enemies and to do them hurt than was he. The King asketh Briant of the Isles how it is that his knights are dead in such sort? 'Sir,' saith Briant, 'Madeglant hath great force of people, and what force of men soever may run upon them, they make a castle of their navy in such sort that none may endure against them, and never did no folk know so much of war as do they. The land lieth far away from you, and more will it cost you to hold it than it is worth; and, if you will believe my counsel, you will trouble yourself no more about it, and they of the country would be well counselled and they did the same.' 'Briant,' saith the King, 'This would be great blame to myself. No worshipful man ought to be idle in guarding

Arthur and Briant

Briant's crafty hints

and holding that which is his own. The worshipful man ought not to hold of things so much for their value as for their honour, and if I should leave the land disgarnished of my aid and my counsel, they will take mine, and will say that I have not heart to protect my land; and even now is it great shame to myself that they have settled themselves there and would fain draw away them of the land to their evil law. And I would fain that Lancelot had achieved that he hath undertaken, and I would have sent him there, for none would protect the land better than he, and, were he now there along with forty knights and with them of the country, Madeglant would make but short stay there.' 'Sir,' saith Briant, 'They of the country reckon nought of you nor any other but Lancelot only, and they say that and you send him there they will make him King.' 'It may well be that they say so,' saith the King, 'But never would Lancelot do aught that should be against my will.' 'Sir,' saith Briant, 'Sith that you are not minded to believe me, I will say no more in this matter, but in the end his knighthood will harm you rather than help you and you take no better heed thereof than up to this time you have done.'

BRANCH XXX

TITLE I

OF Briant of the Isles the story is here silent, whom the King believeth too much in many things, and saith that Lancelot goeth his way right through the forest, full heavy in thought. He had not ridden far when he met a knight that was right sore wounded. He asked him whence he came and who had wounded him in such manner. 'Sir,' saith he, 'I come from the Chapel Perilous, where I was not able to defend me against an evil folk that appeared there; and they have wounded me in such sort as you see, and but for a damsel that came thereinto from the forest I should not have escaped on live. But she aided me on such condition that and I should see a knight they call Lancelot, or Perceval, or Messire Gawain, I should tell which of them soever I should first meet withal that he should go to her without delay, for much she marvelleth her that none of them cometh into the chapel, for none ought to enter there but good knights only. But much do I marvel, Sir, how the damsel durst enter there, for it is the most marvellous place that is, and the damsel is of right great beauty; natheless she cometh thither oftentimes alone into the chapel. A knight lieth in the chapel that hath been slain of late, that was a fell and cruel

Of Lancelot

Meliot lieth sore wounded

knight and a hardy.' 'What was his name?' saith Lancelot. 'He was named Ahuret the Bastard,' saith the knight; 'And he had but one arm and one hand, and the other was smitten off at a castle that Messire Gawain gave Meliot of Logres when he succoured him against this knight that lieth in the coffin. And Meliot of Logres hath slain the knight that had assieged the castle, but the knight wounded him sore, so that he may not be whole save he have the sword wherewith he wounded him, that lieth in the coffin at his side, and some of the cloth wherein he is enshrouded; and, so God grant me to meet one of the knights, gladly will I convey to him the damsel's message.' 'Sir Knight,' saith Lancelot, 'One of them have you found. My name is Lancelot, and for that I see you are wounded and in evil plight, I tell it you thus freely.' 'Sir,' saith the knight, 'Now may God protect your body, for you go in great peril of death. But the damsel much desireth to see you, I know not for what, and well may she aid you if she will.'

II

'Sir Knight, God hath brought us forth of many a peril, and so will He also from this and it be His pleasure and His will.' With that, Lancelot departeth from the knight, and hath ridden so far that he is come at evensong to the Chapel Perilous, that standeth in a great valley of the forest, and hath a little church-yard about it that is well enclosed on all sides, and hath an

ancient cross without the entrance. The chapel and the grave-yard are overshadowed of the forest, that is right tall. Lancelot entereth therein all armed. He signeth him of the cross and blesseth him and commendeth him to God. He seeth in the grave-yard coffins in many places, and it seemeth him that he seeth folk round about that talk together, the one with another. But he might not hear that they said. He might not see them openly, but very tall they seemed him to be. He is come toward the chapel and alighteth of his horse, and seeth a shed outside the chapel, wherein was provender for horses. He goeth thither to set his own there, then leaneth his shield against his spear at the entrance of the chapel, and entereth in, where it was very dark, for no light was there save only of a single lamp that shone full darkly. He seeth the coffin that was in the midst of the chapel wherein the knight lay.

Lancelot in the chapel

III

When he had made his orison before an image of Our Lady, he cometh to the coffin and openeth it as fast as he may, and seeth the knight, tall and foul of favour, that therein lay dead. The cloth wherein he was enshrouded was displayed all bloody. He taketh the sword that lay at his side and lifteth the winding-sheet to rend it at the seam, then taketh the knight by the head to lift him upward, and findeth him so heavy and so ungain that scarce may he remove him. He cutteth off the half of the cloth wherein he is enshrouded, and the

The Grave-yard Perilous

coffin beginneth to make a crashing so passing loud that it seemed the chapel were falling. When he hath the piece of the cloth and the sword he closeth the coffin again, and forthwith cometh to the door of the chapel and seeth mount, in the midst of the grave-yard as it seemed him, great knights and horrible, and they are apparelled as it were to combat, and him thinketh that they are watching for him and espy him.

IV

Thereupon, behold you, a damsel running, her kirtle girt high about her, right through the grave-yard a great pace. 'Take heed you move not until such time as it is known who the knight is!' She is come to the chapel. 'Sir Knight, lay down the sword and this that you have taken of the winding-sheet of the dead knight!' 'Damsel,' saith Lancelot, 'What hurt doth it you of this that I have?' 'This,' saith she, 'That you have taken it without my leave; for I have him in charge, both him and the chapel. And I would fain,' saith she, 'know what is your name?' 'Damsel,' saith he, 'What would you gain of knowing my name?' 'I know not,' saith she, 'whether I shall have either loss or gain thereof, but high time already is it that I should ask you it to my sorrow, for many a time have I been deceived therein.' 'Damsel,' saith he, 'I am called Lancelot of the Lake.' 'You ought of right,' saith she, 'to have the sword and the cloth; but come you with me to my castle, for often-

times have I desired that you and Perceval and Messire Gawain should see the three tombs that I have made for your three selves.' **Lancelot refuseth a damsel**

V

'Damsel,' saith he, 'No wish have I to see my sepulchre so early betimes.' 'By my head,' saith she, 'And you come not thither, you may not issue from hence without tribulation; and they that you see there are earthly fiends that guard this grave-yard and are at my commandment.' 'Never, damsel, please God,' saith Lancelot, 'may your devils have power to harm a Christian.' 'Ha, Lancelot,' saith she, 'I beseech and pray you that you come with me into my castle, and I will save your life as at this time from this folk that are just now ready to fall upon you; and, so you are not willing to do this, yield me back the sword that you have taken from the coffin, and go your way at once.' 'Damsel,' saith Lancelot, 'Into your castle may I not go, nor desire I to go, wherefore pray me no more thereof, for other business have I to do; nor will I yield you back the sword, whatsoever may befall me, for a certain knight may not otherwise be healed, and great pity it were that he should die.' 'Ha, Lancelot,' saith she, 'How hard and cruel do I find you towards me! And as good cause have I to be sorry that you have the sword as have you to be glad. For, and you had not had it upon you, never should you have carried it off from hence at your will; rather should I have had all my pleasure of you, and I would have made you

Lancelot benighted

be borne into my castle, from whence never should you have moved again for nought you might do; and thus should I have been quit of the wardenship of this chapel and of coming thereinto in such manner as now oftentimes I needs must come.

VI

'But now am I taken in a trap, for, so long as you have the sword, not one of them that are there yonder can do you evil nor hinder you of going.' Of this was Lancelot not sorry. He taketh leave of the damsel, that departeth grudgingly, garnisheth him again of his arms, then mounteth again on his horse and goeth his way right through the grave-yard. He beholdeth this evil folk, that were so foul and huge and hideous, it seemed as if they would devour everything. They made way for Lancelot, and had no power to hurt him. He is issued forth of the grave-yard and goeth his way through the forest until daylight appeared about him, fair and clear. He found the hermit there where he had heard mass, then ate a little, then departed and rode the day long until setting of the sun, but could find no hold on the one side nor the other wherein he might lodge, and so was benighted in the forest.

VII

Lancelot knew not which way to turn, for he had not often been in the forest, and knew not how the land lay nor the paths therein. He rode until he found a little causeway, and there

The Castle of Griffons

was a path at the side that led to an orchard that was at a corner of the forest, where there was a postern gate whereby one entered, and it was not made fast for the night. And the orchard was well enclosed with walls. Lancelot entered in and made fast the entrance, then took off his horse's bridle and let him feed on the grass. He might not espy the castle that was hard by for the abundance of trees and the darkness of the night, and so knew not whither he was arrived. He laid his shield for a pillow and his arms at his side and fell on sleep. But, had he known where it was he had come, little sleep would he have had, for he was close to the cavern where he slew the lion and where the griffons were, that had come in from the forest all gorged of victual, and were fallen on sleep, and it was for them that the postern gate had been left unbolted. A damsel went down from a chamber by a trap-door with a brachet on her arm for fear of the griffons, and as she went toward the postern-gate to lock it, she espied Lancelot, that lay asleep in the midst of the orchard. She ran back to her Lady the speediest she might, and said to her: 'Up, Lady!' saith she, 'Lancelot is sleeping in the orchard!' She leapt up incontinent and came to the orchard there where Lancelot was sleeping, then sate her down beside him and began to look at him, sighing the while, and draweth as near him as she may. 'Fair Lord God,' saith she, 'what shall I do? and I wake him first he will have no care to kiss me, and if I kiss him sleeping he will awake forthwith; and better

Lancelot is kissed sleeping

hap is it for me to take the most I may even in such-wise than to fail of all, and moreover, if so be I shall have kissed him, I may hope that he will not hate me thereof, sith that I may then boast that I have had at least so much of that which is his own.' She set her mouth close to him and so kissed him the best and fairest she might, three times, and Lancelot awakened forthwith. He leapt up and made the cross upon him, then looked at the damsel, and said: 'Ha, God! where, then, am I?' 'Fair sweet friend,' saith she, 'You are nigh her that hath all set her heart upon you and will remove it never.' 'I cry you mercy, damsel,' saith Lancelot, 'and I tell you, for nought that may befall, one that loveth me, please God, never will I hate! but that which one hath loved long time ought not so soon to fall away from the remembrance of a love that is rooted in the heart, when she hath been proven good and loyal, nor ought one so soon to depart therefrom.'

VIII

'Sir,' saith she, 'This castle is at your commandment, and you will remain therein, and well may you know my thought towards you. Would that your thought were the same towards me.' 'Damsel,' saith he, 'I seek the healing of a knight that may not be healed save I bring him the head of one of your serpents.' 'Certes, Sir, so hath it been said. But I bade the damsel say so only for that I was fain you should come back hither to me.' 'Damsel,'

saith he, 'I have come back hither, and so may I turn back again sith that of the serpent's head is there no need.' 'Ha, Lancelot,' saith she, 'How good a knight are you, and how ill default do you make in another way! No knight, methinketh, is there in the world that would have refused me save only you. This cometh of your folly, and your outrage, and your baseness of heart! The griffons have not done my will in that they have not slain you or strangled you as you slept, and, so I thought that they would have power to slay you, I would make them come to slay you now. But the devil hath put so much knighthood into you that scarce any man may have protection against you. Better ought I to love you dead than alive. By my head, I would fain that your head were hanged with the others that hang at the entrance of the gateway, and, had I thought you would have failed me in such wise I would have brought my father here to where you were sleeping, and right gladly would he have slain you. The damsel plaineth

IX

'None that knoweth the covenant between me and you ought to hold you for a good knight; for you have cozened me of my right according to the tenor and custom of the castle if that through perversity or slothfulness you durst not take me when you have won me.' 'Damsel,' saith Lancelot, 'You may say your will. You have done so much for me sithence that I came hither that I ought not to be afeard

Castle Perilous

of you, for traitor is the man or woman that kisseth another to procure his hurt.' 'Lancelot, I took but that I might have, for well I see that none more thereof may I have never again.' He goeth to put the bridle on his destrier, and then taketh leave of the damsel, that parteth from him right sorrowfully; but Lancelot would no longer tarry, for great throng of knights was there in the castle, and he was not minded to put him in jeopardy for nought. He issueth forth of the orchard, and the damsel looketh after him as long as she may see him. After that, cometh she to her chamber, sad and vexed at heart, nor knoweth she how she may bear herself, for the thing in the world that most she loveth is far away, and no joy may she have thereof.

x

Lancelot rideth right amidst the forest until it is day, and cometh at the right hour of noon to the Castle Perilous, where Meliot of Logres lay. He entered into the castle. The damsel that was at King Arthur's court cometh to meet him. 'Lancelot,' saith she, 'Welcome may you be!' 'Damsel,' saith he, 'Good adventure may you have!' He was alighted at the mounting-stage of the hall. She maketh him mount up the steps and afterward be disarmed. 'Damsel,' saith he, 'Behold, here is some of the winding-sheet wherein the knight was shrouded, and here is his sword; but you befooled me as concerning the serpent's head.' 'By my head,' saith the damsel, 'that did I

for the sake of the damsel of the Castle of Griffons that hateth you not a whit, for so prayed she me to do. Now hath she seen you, and so will she be more at ease, and will have no cause to ask me thereof.' Lancelot and Meliot

XI

The damsel leadeth Lancelot to where Meliot of Logres lay. Lancelot sitteth him down before him and asketh how it is with him? 'Meliot,' saith the damsel, 'This is Lancelot, that bringeth you your healing.' 'Ha, Sir, welcome may you be!' 'God grant you health speedily,' saith Lancelot. 'Ha, for God's sake,' saith Meliot, 'What doth Messire Gawain? Is he hearty?' 'I left him quite hearty when I parted from him,' saith Lancelot, 'And so he knew that you had been wounded in such sort, full sorry would he be thereof and King Arthur likewise.' 'Sir,' saith he, 'The knight that assieged them maimed me in this fashion, but was himself maimed in such sort that he is dead thereof. But the wounds that he dealt me are so cruel and so raging, that they may not be healed save his sword toucheth them and if they be not bound with some of the winding-sheet wherein he was shrouded, that he had displayed about him, all bloody.' 'By my faith,' saith the damsel, 'Behold them here!' 'Ha, Sir,' saith he, 'Gramercy of this great goodness! In every way appeareth it that you are good knight, for, but for the goodness of your knighthood, the coffin wherein the knight lieth had never opened so lightly,

Meliot is healed

nor would you never have had the sword nor the cloth, nor never till now hath knight entered therein but either he were slain there, or departed thence wounded right grievously.' They uncover his wounds, and Lancelot unbindeth them, and the damsel toucheth him of the sword and the winding-sheet, and they are assuaged for him. And he saith that now at last he knoweth well he need not fear to die thereof. Lancelot is right joyful thereof in his heart, for that he seeth he will be whole betimes; and sore pity had it been of his death, for a good knight was he, and wise and loyal.

XII

'Lancelot,' saith the lady, 'Long time have I hated you on account of the knight that I loved, whom you reft away from me and married to another and not to me, and ofttimes have I put myself to pains to grieve you of some ill deed for that you did to me, for never was I so sorrowful for aught that befell me. He loved me of right great love, and I him again, and never shall that love fail. But now is it far further away from me than it was before, and for this bounty that you have done, never hereafter need you fear aught of my grievance.' 'Damsel,' saith Lancelot, 'Gramercy heartily.' He was lodged in the castle the night richly and worshipfully, and departed thence on the morrow when he had taken leave of the damsel and Meliot, and goeth back a great pace toward the court of King Arthur, that was sore dismayed, for Madeglant was conquering his islands

and great part of his land. The more part of the lands that he conquered had renounced the New Law for fear of death and held the false believe. And Messire Gawain and many other knights were departed from King Arthur's court for that the King trusted more in Briant of the Isles than he did in them. Lancelot's return

XIII

For many times had King Arthur sent knights against Madeglant since Lancelot was departed from the court, to the intent that they should put to rebuke the enemies of his land, but never saw he one come back from thence nought discomfited. The King of Oriande made much boast that he would fulfil for his sister all that she had bidden him, for he thought that King Arthur would yield himself up betimes to him and yield all his land likewise. The King greatly desired the return of Lancelot, and said ofttimes that and he had been against his enemies as nigh as the others he had sent they would not have durst so to fly against him. In the midst of the dismay wherein was King Arthur, Lancelot returned to the court, whereof was the King right joyous. Lancelot knew that Messire Gawain and Messire Ywain were not there, and that they held them aloof from the court more willingly than they allowed on account of Briant of the Isles, that King Arthur believed in more than ever a one of the others. He was minded to depart in like sort, but the King would not let him, but said to him rather, 'Lancelot, I pray and beseech

Madeglant is slain

you, as him that I love much, that you set your pains and your counsel on defending my land, for great affiance have I in you.' 'Sir,' saith Lancelot, 'My aid and my force shall fail you never; take heed that yours fail not me.' 'Of right ought I not to fail you,' saith the King, 'Nor will I never, for I should fail myself thereby.'

XIV

The history saith that he gave Lancelot forty knights in charge, and that he is come into an island where King Madeglant was. Or ever he knew of his coming, Lancelot had cut off his retreat, for he cut his cables and beat his anchors to pieces and broke up his ships. After that, he struck among the people of Madeglant, and slew as many of them as he would, he and his knights. The King thought to withdraw him back, both him and his fellowship, into safety as he wont, but he found himself right ill bested. Lancelot drove him toward the sea, whither he fled, but only to find himself no less decomfit there, and slew him in the midst of his folk, and all his other knights were slain and cast into the sea. This island was freed of him by Lancelot, and from thence he went to the other islands that Madeglant had conquered and set again under the false Law, and there did away the false Law from them that had been set thereunder by fear of death, and stablished the land in such sort as it had been tofore. He roved so long from one island to another that presently he came to Albanie where he had succoured them at first.

XV

Lancelot's new ordinance

When they of the land saw him come, they well knew that the King of Oriande was dead and the islands made free, whereof made they great joy. The land was some deal emptied of the most puissant and the strongest, for they were dead along with their lord. Lancelot had brought with him some of the best knights and most puissant. He was come with a great navy into the land and began to destroy it. They of the land were misbelievers, for they believed in false idols and in false images. They saw that they might not defend the land, sith that their lord was dead. The more part let themselves be slain for that they would not renounce the evil Law, and they that were minded to turn to God were saved. The kingdom was right rich and right great that Lancelot conquered and attorned to the Law of Our Lord in such wise. He made break all the false images of copper and latten wherein they had believed tofore, and whereof false answers came to them of the voices of devils. Thereafter he caused be made crucifixes and images in the likeness of Our Lord, and in the likeness of His sweet Mother, the better to confirm them of the kingdoms in the Law.

XVI

The strongest and most valiant of the land assembled one day and said that it was high time a land so rich should no longer be without a King. They all agreed and came to Lance-

King Claudas

lot and told him how they would fain that he should be King of the realm he had conquered, for in no land might he be better employed, and they would help him conquer other realms enow. Lancelot thanked them much, but told them that of this land nor of none other would he be King save by the approval of King Arthur only; for that all the conquest he had made was his, and by his commandment had he come thither, and had given him his own knights in charge that had helped him to reconquer the lands.

XVII

King Claudas had heard tell how Lancelot had slain the King of Oriande and that none of the islands might scarce be defended against him. He had no liking of him, neither of his good knighthood nor of his conquest, for well remembered he of the land that he had conquered from King Ban of Benoic that was Lancelot's father, and therefore was he sorry of the good knighthood whereof Lancelot was everywhere held of worth and renown, for that he was tenant of his father's land. King Claudas sent a privy message to Briant and bore him on hand that, and he might do so much as that King Arthur should forbid Lancelot his court, and that it were ill with him with the King, he would have much liking thereof and would help him betimes to take vengeance on his enemies, for, so Lancelot were forth of his court, and Messire Gawain, the rest would scarce abide long time, and thus should they

have all their will of King Arthur's land. Briant sent word back to King Claudas that Messire Gawain and Messire Ywain began to hold them aloof from the court, and that as for most part of the other he need not trouble him a whit, for he might so deal as that in short time Lancelot should be well trounced, would they or nould they. **Briant's treason**

XVIII

Tidings are come to King Arthur's court that the King of Oriande is dead and his people destroyed, and that Lancelot hath conquered his kingdom and slain the King, and reconquered all the lands wherein he had set the false Law and the false believe by his force and by dread of him. And the more part say in the court that they of the realm of Oriande nor those of the other islands will not let Lancelot repair to court, and are doing their endeavour to make him King; and nought is there in the world, and he command them, they will not do, and that never was no folk so obedient to any as are they of all these lands to him. Briant of the Isles cometh one day privily to King Arthur, and saith: 'Sir,' saith he, 'Much ought I to love you, for that you have made me Seneschal of your land; whereby meseemeth you have great affiance in me, and my bounden duty is it to turn aside that which is evil from you and to set forward your good everywhere, and, did I not so, no whit loyal should I be towards you.

More treason

XIX

'Tidings are come to me of late that they of the kingdom of Oriande and Albanie and of the other islands that are your appanages have all leagued together, and have sworn and given surety that they will aid one another against you, and they are going presently to make Lancelot their King, and will come down upon your land as speedily as they may wheresoever he may dare lead them, and they have sworn their oath that they will conquer your kingdom just as you now hold it, and, so you be not garnished against them betimes, you may have thereof sore trouble to your own body as well as the loss whereof I tell you.' 'By my head,' saith the King, 'I believe not that Lancelot durst think this, nor that he would have the heart to do me evil.' 'By my head,' saith Briant, 'Long time have I had misgivings both of this and of him, but one ought not to tell one's lord all that one knows, for that one cannot be sure either that it be not leasing or that folk wish to meddle in his affairs out of envy. But nought is there in the world that I will conceal from you henceforward for the love that you bear me and for that you have affiance in me, and so may you well have, for I have abandoned my land for you that marched with your own, whereby you may sorely straiten your enemies, for well you know that in your court is there no knight of greater power than am I.'

XX

Arthur betrayeth Lancelot

'By my head,' saith the King, 'I am fain to love you and hold you dear, nor shall you never be removed from my love nor from my service for nought that may be said of any, so manifestly have I seen your goodness and your loyalty. I will bid Lancelot by my letters and under my seal that he come to speak with me, for sore need have I thereof, and when he shall be here we will take account of this that you have told me, for this will I not, that he nor none other that may be my knight shall dare rise in arms against me, for such power ought lord of right to have over his knight, and to be feared and dreaded of him, for elsewise is he feeble, and lordship without power availeth nought.'

XXI

The King sent his letters by his messenger to Lancelot. The messenger sought him until he found him in the kingdom of Oriande, and delivered him the letters and the seal of the King. So soon as he knew that which the letters say, he took leave of them of the land, that were right sorrowful. He departed thence and came back to Cardoil, bringing with him all the knights that he had in charge, and told the King that he had reconquered for him all the islands, and that the King of Oriande was dead and that his land was attorned to the Law of Our Lord. The King bade Briant of the Isles that he should make forty knights come armed under their cloaks ready to take Lancelot

Lancelot taken prisoner

prisoner as soon as he should command them. The tidings come to Lancelot, there where he was in his hostel, that the King had made knights come all armed to the palace. Lancelot bethought him that some need had arisen and that he would arm himself likewise, so he made him be armed and came to the hall where the King was. 'Sir,' saith Briant, 'Lancelot thinketh him of something, for he hath armed himself at his hostel, and is come hither in such manner and at such time without your leave, and he may do something more yet. You ought well to ask him wherefore he wisheth to do you evil, and in what manner you have deserved it.' He biddeth him be called before him. 'Lancelot,' saith the King, 'Wherefore are you armed?' 'Sir, I was told that knights had come in hither armed, and I was feared lest some mishap had befallen you, for I would not that any evil should betide you.' 'You come hither for another thing,' saith the King, 'according to that I have been given to wit, and, had the hall been void of folk, you hoped to have slain me.' The King commandeth him be taken forthwith without gainsay of any. The knights that were armed did off their cloaks and leapt toward him on all sides, for they durst not disobey the King's commandment, and the more part were men of Briant of the Isles.

XXII

Lancelot seeth them coming towards him with their keen swords and saith, 'By my

head, an evil guerdon do you return me of the services I have done for you.' The knights come to him all together swords drawn, and run upon him all at once. He goeth defending himself, as far as the wall of the hall, whereof he maketh a castle to his back, but before he cometh thither he hath slain or wounded seven. He began to defend himself right stoutly on all sides, but they give him great buffets of their swords, and no fair play is it of thirty or forty blows to one. Nor ought none believe that one single knight might deliver himself from so many men, seeing that they were eager to take him and to do him a hurt. Lancelot defended him the best he might, but the numbers were against him, and, anyway, or ever he let himself be taken he sold himself right dear, for of the forty knights he harmed at least a score, and of them was none that was not sore wounded and the most part killed; and he caught Briant of the Isles, that was helping to take him, so sore that he made his sword drink the blood of his body, in such sort that the wound was right wide. The knights laid hold on Lancelot on all sides, and the King commanded that none should harm him, but that they should bring him to his dungeon in the prison. Lancelot marvelled him much wherefore the King should do this, nor might he understand wherefore this hatred was come so lately. He is put in the prison so as the King hath commanded. All they of the court are sorry thereof, save Briant and his knights, but well may he yet aby it dear, so God bring Lancelot out of

by Briant's men

A prophecy

prison. Some say, 'Now is the King's court lost, sith that Messire Gawain and the other knights have thus forsaken it, and Lancelot is put in prison for doing well, ill trust may the others have therein.' They pray God yet grant Briant of the Isles an evil guerdon, for well know they that all this is of his procurement. And of an evil guerdon shall he not fail so God protect Lancelot and bring him forth of prison.

BRANCH XXXI

TITLE I

THEREUPON the story is silent of Lancelot, and cometh back to Perceval that had not heard these tidings, and if he had known them, right sorrowful would he have been thereof. He is departed from his uncle's castle that he hath reconquered, and was sore grieved of the tidings that the damsel that was wounded brought him of his sister that Aristot had carried away by force to the house of a vavasour. He was about to take her to wife and cut off her head on the day of the New Year, for such was his custom with all them that he took. Perceval rideth one day, all heavy in thought, and taketh his way as fast as he may toward the hermitage of his uncle King Hermit. He is come thither on an eventide, and seeth three hermits issued forth of the hermitage. He alighteth and goeth to meet them so soon as he seeth them. 'Sir,' say the hermits, 'Enter not in, for they are laying out a body there.' 'Who is it?' saith Perceval. 'Sir,' say the hermits, 'It is the good King Pelles that Aristot slew suddenly after mass on account of one of his nephews, Perceval, whom he loveth not, and a damsel is laying out the body there within.' When Perceval heard the

Aristot's custom

King Hermit slain

news of his uncle that is dead, thereof was he right grieved at heart, and on the morrow was he at his uncle's burial. When mass was sung, Perceval would have departed, as he that had great desire to take vengeance on him that had done him such shame.

II

Thereupon behold you the damsel that is his. 'Sir,' saith she, 'Full long time have I been seeking you. Behold here the head of a knight that I carry hanging at the bow of my saddle, in this rich casket of ivory that you may see, and by none ought he to be avenged but by you alone. Discharge me thereof, fair Sir, of your courtesy, for I have carried it too long a time, and this King Arthur knoweth well and Messire Gawain, for each hath seen me at court along with the head, but they could give me no tidings of you, and my castle may I not have again until such time as he be avenged.' 'Who, then, was the knight, damsel?' saith Perceval. 'Sir, he was son of your uncle Bruns Brandalis, and were he on live, would have been one of the best knights in the world.' 'And who slew him, damsel?' saith Perceval. 'Sir, the Knight of the Deep Forest that leadeth the lion, foully in treason there where he thought him safe. For had he been armed in like manner as was the other, he would not have slain him.' 'Damsel,' saith Perceval, 'This grieveth me that he hath slain him, and it grieveth me likewise of mine uncle King Hermit, whom I would avenge more willingly

than all the men in the world, for he was slain on my account. The Red Knight

III

'Most disloyal was this knight, and foully was he fain to avenge him when he slew a holy man, a hermit that never wished him ill on account of me and of none other. Right glad shall I be and I may find the knight, and so, methinketh, will he be of me, for me he hateth as much I do him, as I have been told, and Lord God grant, howsoever he may take it, that I may find him betimes. 'Sir,' saith the damsel, 'So outrageous a knight is he that no knight is there in the world so good but he thinketh himself of more worth than he, and sith that he hateth you with a will, and he knew that you were here, you and another, or you the third, he would come now at once, were he in place and free.' 'Damsel,' saith Perceval, 'God give him mischief of his coming, come whensoever he may!' 'Sir,' saith she, 'The Deep Forest there, where the Red Knight leadeth the lion, is towards the castle of Aristot, and, or ever you come by adventure into the forest, you may well hear some tidings of him!'

BRANCH XXXII

INCIPIT

Aristot and Dindrane

HERE beginneth the last branch of the Graal in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

TITLE I

The story saith that Perceval went his way through the forest. He saw pass before him two squires, and each carried a wild deer trussed behind him that had been taken by hounds. Perceval cometh to them a great pace and maketh them abide. 'Lords,' saith he, 'Whither will you carry this venison?' 'Sir,' say the squires, 'To the castle of Ariste, whereof Aristot is lord.' 'Is there great throng of knights at the castle?' saith Perceval. 'Sir,' say the squires, 'Not a single one is there, but within four days will be a thousand there, for Messire is about to marry, whereof is great preparation toward. He is going to take the daughter of the Widow Lady, whom he carried off by force before her castle of Camelot, and hath set her in the house of one of his vavasours until such time as he shall espouse her. But we are right sorrowful, for she is of most noble lineage and of great beauty and of the most worth in the world. So is it

great dole that he shall have her, for he will cut her head off on the day of the New Year, sith that such is his custom.' 'And one might carry her off,' saith Perceval, 'would he not do well therein?' 'Yea, Sir!' say the squires, 'Our Lord God would be well pleased thereof, for such cruelty is the greatest that ever any knight may have. Moreover, he is much blamed of a good hermit that he hath slain, and every day desireth he to meet the brother of the damsel he is about to take, that is one of the best knights in the world. And he saith that he would slay him more gladly than ever another knight on live.' 'And where is your lord?' saith Perceval, 'Can you give me witting?' 'Yea, Sir,' say the squires, 'We parted from him but now in this forest, where he held melly with a knight that seemeth us to be right worshipful and valiant, and saith that he hath for name the Knight Hardy. And for that he told Aristot that he was a knight of Perceval's and of his fellowship, he ran upon him, and then commanded us to come on, and said that he should vanquish him incontinent. We could still hear just now the blows of the swords yonder where we were in the forest, and Aristot is of so cruel conditions that no knight may pass through this forest, but he is minded to slay him.'

Tidings of Aristot

II

When Perceval heard these tidings, he departed from the squires, and so soon as they were out of sight he goeth as great pace thither

The Knight Hardy

as they had come thence. He had ridden half a league Welsh when he heard the buffets they were dealing one another on the helm with their swords, and right well pleased was he for that the Knight Hardy held so long time melly with Aristot in whom is there so much cruelty and felony. But Perceval knew not to what mischief the Knight Hardy had been wounded through the body of a spear, so that the blood rayed out on all sides; and Aristot had not remained whole, for he was wounded in two places. So soon as Perceval espied them, he smiteth his horse of his spurs, lance in rest, and smiteth Aristot right through the breast with such force that he maketh him lose his stirrups and lie down backwards over the hinder bow of the saddle. After that saith he: 'I am come to my sister's wedding, of right ought it not to be made without me.'

III

Aristot, that was full hardy, set himself again between the bows of the saddle in great wrath when he seeth Perceval, and cometh towards him like as if he were wood mad, sword in hand, and dealeth him such a buffet on the helm as that it is all dented in thereby. The Knight Hardy draweth back when he seeth Perceval, for he is wounded to the death through the body. He had held the stour so long time that he could abide no more. But or ever he departed, he had wounded Aristot in two places right grievously. Perceval felt the blow that was heavy, and that his helmet was dinted in.

He cometh back to Aristot and smiteth him so passing strongly that he thrusteth the spear right through his body and overthroweth him and his horse all of a heap. Then he alighteth over him and taketh off the coif of his habergeon and unlaceth his ventail. 'What have you in mind to do?' saith Aristot. 'I will cut off your head,' saith Perceval, 'and present it to my sister whom you have failed.' 'Do not so!' saith Aristot, 'But let me live, and I will forgo my hatred.' 'Your hatred might I well abide henceforward, meseemeth,' saith Perceval, 'But one may not abide you any longer, for well have you deserved this, and God willeth not to bear with you.' He smiteth off his head incontinent and hangeth it at his saddle-bow, and cometh to the Knight Hardy, and asketh him how it is with him. 'Sir,' saith he, 'I am very nigh my death, but I comfort me much of this that I see you tofore I die.' Perceval is remounted on his horse, then taketh his spear and leaveth the body of the knight in the midst of the launde, and so departeth forthwith and leadeth the Knight Hardy to a hermitage that was hard by there, and lifteth him down of his horse as speedily as he may. After that, he disarmed him and made him confess to the hermit, and when he was shriven of his sins and repentant, and his soul had departed, he made him be enshrouded of the damsel that followed him, and bestowed his arms and his horse on the hermit for his soul, and the horse of Aristot likewise.

Perceval slayeth Aristot

The Red Knight's lion

IV

When mass had been sung for the knight that was dead, and the body buried, Perceval departed. 'Sir,' saith the damsel that followed him, 'Even now have you much to do. Of this cruel knight and felonous you have avenged this country. Now, God grant you find betimes the Red Knight that slew your uncle's son. I doubt not but that you will conquer him, but great misgiving have I of the lion, for it is the cruellest beast that saw I ever, and he so loveth his lord and his horse as never no beast loved another so much, and he helpeth his lord right hardily to defend him.'

V

Perceval goeth toward the great Deep Forest without tarrying, and the damsel after. But, or ever he came thither, he met a knight that was wounded right sore, both he and his horse. 'Ha, Sir,' saith he to Perceval, 'Enter not into this forest, whence I have scarce escaped with much pains. For therein is a knight that had much trouble of rescuing me from his lion; and no less am I in dread to pass on forward, for there is a knight that is called Aristot, that without occasion runneth upon the knights that pass through the forest.' 'Of him,' saith the damsel, 'need you have no fear, for you may see his head hanging at the knight's saddle-bow.'

VI

Aristot's horse

'Certes,' saith the knight, 'Never yet was I so glad of any tidings I have heard, and well know I that he that slew him is not lacking of great hardiment.' The knight departeth from Perceval, but the lion had wounded his horse so passing sore in the quarters that scarce could he go. 'Sir Knight,' saith Perceval, 'Go to the hermit in the Deep Forest, and say I bade him give you the destrier I left with him, for well I see that you have sore need thereof, and you may repay him in some other manner, for rather would he have something else than the horse.' The knight giveth him much thanks of this that he saith. He cometh to the hermit the best he may, and telleth him according as he had been charged, and the hermit biddeth him take which destrier he will for the love of the knight that had slain the evil-doer, that did so many evil deeds in this forest. 'And I will lend you them both twain if you will.' 'Sir,' saith the knight, 'I ask but for one of them.' He taketh Aristot's horse, that seemed him the better, and straightway mounteth thereon, and abandoneth his own, that might go no further. He taketh leave of the hermit, and telleth him he will right well repay him, but better had it befallen him and he had not taken the horse, for thereof was he slain without reason thereafter. A knight that was of the household of Aristot overtook him at the corner of the forest, and knew his lord's horse and had heard tell that Aristot was dead, wherefore he went into

Perceval slayeth the lion

the forest to bury him. He smote the knight through the body with his spear and so slew him, then took the horse and went away forthwith. But, had Perceval known thereof, he would have been little glad, for that he asked the knight to go for the horse, but he did it only for the best, and for that he rode in great misease.

VII

Perceval goeth toward the Deep Forest, that is full broad and long and evil seeming, and when he was entered in, he had scarce ridden a space when he espied the lion that lay in the midst of a launde under a tree and was waiting for his master, that was gone afar into the forest, and the lion well knew that just there was the way whereby knights had to pass, and therefore had abided there. The damsel draweth her back for fear, and Perceval goeth toward the lion that had espied him already, and came toward him, eyes on fire and jaws yawning wide. Perceval aimeth his spear and thinketh to smite him in his open mouth, but the lion swerved aside and he caught him in the fore-leg and so dealt him a great wound, but the lion seizeth the horse with his claws on the croup, and rendeth the skin and the flesh above the tail. The horse, that feeleth himself wounded, catcheth him with his two hinder feet or ever he could get away, so passing strongly that he breaketh the master-teeth in his jaw. The lion gave out a roar so loud that all the forest resounded thereof. The Red Knight

heareth his lion roar, and so cometh thither a great gallop, but, or ever he was come thither, Perceval had slain the lion. When the knight saw his lion dead, right sorry was he thereof. 'By my head,' saith he to Perceval, 'When you slew my lion you did it as a traitor!' 'And you,' saith Perceval, 'adjudged your own death when you slew my uncle's son, whose head this damsel beareth.' Perceval cometh against him without more words, and the knight in like manner with a great rushing, and breaketh his spear upon his shield. Perceval smiteth him with such force that he thrusteth his spear right through his body and beareth him to the ground dead beside his horse. Perceval alighteth of his own when he hath slain the knight, and then mounteth him on the Red Knight's horse for that his own might carry him no longer. and the Red Knight

VIII

'Sir,' saith the damsel, 'My castle is in the midst of this forest, that the Red Knight reft away from me long ago. I pray you now come with me thither that I may be assured thereof in such sort as that I may have it again wholly.' 'Damsel,' saith Perceval, 'This have I no right to deny you.' They ride amidst the forest so long as that they come to the castle where the damsel ought to be. It stood in the fairest place of all the forest, and was enclosed of high walls battlemented, and within were fair-windowed halls. The tidings were come to the castle that their lord was dead.

Dindrane lamenteth

Perceval and the damsel entered in. He made the damsel be assured of them that were therein, and made them yield up her castle that they well knew was hers of right inheritance. The damsel made the head be buried that she had carried so long, and bade that every day should mass be done within for the soul of him. When Perceval had sojourned therein as long as pleased him, he departed thence. The damsel thanked him much of the bounty he had done her as concerning the castle that she had again by him, for never again should it be reconquered of another, as well she knew.

IX

Josephus telleth us in the scripture he recordeth for us, whereof this history was drawn out of Latin into Romance, that none need be in doubt that these adventures befell at that time in Great Britain and in all the other kingdoms, and plenty enow more befell than I record, but these were the most certain. The history saith that Perceval is come into a hold, there where his sister was in the house of a vavasour that was a right worshipful man. Each day the damsel made great dole of the knight that was to take her, for the day was already drawing somewhat nigh, and she knew not that he was dead. Full often lamented she the Widow Lady her mother, that in like sort made great dole for her daughter. The vavasour comforted the damsel right sweetly and longed for her brother Perceval, but little thought he that he was so near him. And Perceval is come to the hold all armed, and

alighteth at the mounting-stage before the hall. The vavasour cometh to meet him, and marvelleth much who he is, for the more part believed that he was one of Aristot's knights. 'Sir,' saith the vavasour, 'Welcome may you be!' 'Good adventure may you have, Sir!' saith Perceval. He holdeth Aristot's head in his hand by the hair, whereof the vavasour marvelled much that he should carry a knight's head in such-wise. Perceval cometh to the master-chamber of the hall, where his sister was, that bewailed her right sore. **Perceval comforteth her**

x

'Damsel,' saith he to his sister, 'Weep not, for your wedding hath failed. You may know it well by this token!' He throweth the head of Aristot before her on the ground, then saith to her: 'Behold here the head of him that was to take you!' The damsel heareth Perceval her brother that was armed, and thereby she knoweth him again. She leapeth up and maketh him the greatest joy that ever damsel made to knight. She knoweth not what to do. So joyful is she, that all have pity on her that see her of her weeping for the joy that she maketh of her brother. The story saith that they sojourned therewithin and that the vavasour showed them much honour. The damsel made cast the knight's head into a river that ran round about the hold. The vavasour was right glad of his death for the great felony that he had in him, and for that needs must the damsel die in less than a year and she had espoused him.

Perceval and Dindrane

XI

When Perceval had been therein as long as it pleased him, he thanked the vavasour much of the honour he had done him and his sister, and departed, he and his sister along with him on the mule whereon she had been brought thither. Perceval rode so long on his journeys that he is come to Camelot and findeth his mother in great dole for her daughter that should be Queen, for she thought surely that never should she see her more. Full sorrowful was she moreover of her brother, the King Hermit that had been killed in such-wise. Perceval cometh to the chamber where his mother was lying and might not stint of making dole. He taketh his sister by the hand and cometh before her. So soon as she knoweth him she beginneth to weep for joy, and kisseth them one after the other. 'Fair son,' saith she, 'Blessed be the hour that you were born, for by you all my great joy cometh back to me! Now well may I depart, for I have lived long enow.' 'Lady,' saith he, 'Your life ought to be an offence to none, for to none hath it ever done ill, but, please God, you shall not end in this place, but rather you shall end in the castle that was your cousin's german, King Fisherman, there where is the most Holy Graal and the sacred hallows are.' 'Fair son,' saith she, 'You say well, and there would I fain be.' 'Lady,' saith he, 'God will provide counsel and means whereby you shall be there; and my sister, and she be minded to marry, will we set in good place, where she may live worship-

fully.' 'Certes, fair brother,' saith she, 'None shall I never marry, save God alone.' 'Fair son,' saith the Widow Lady, 'The Damsel of the Car goeth to seek you, and I shall end not until such time as she hath found you.' 'Lady,' saith he, 'In some place will she have tidings of me and I of her.' 'Fair son,' saith the Lady, 'The damsel is here within that the felonous knight wounded through the arm, that carried off your sister, but she is healed.' 'Lady,' saith he, 'I am well avenged.' He telleth her all the adventures until the time when he reconquered the castle that was his uncle's. He sojourned long time with his mother in the castle, and saw that the land was all assured and peaceable. He departed thence and took his leave, for he had not yet achieved all that he had to do. His mother remained long time, and his sister, at Camelot, and led a good life and a holy. The lady made make a chapel right rich about the sepulchre that lay between the forest and Camelot, and had it adorned of rich vestments, and stablished a chaplain that should sing mass there every day. Sithence then hath the place been so builded up as that there is an abbey there and folk of religion, and many bear witness that there it is still, right fair. Perceval was departed from Camelot and entered into the great forest, and so rode of a long while until he had left his mother's castle far behind, and came toward evening to the hold of a knight that was at the head of the forest. He harboured him therein, and the knight showed him much honour and made him be unarmed,

return to Camelot

Aristot's horse and brought him a robe to do on. Perceval seeth that the knight is a right simple man, and that he sigheth from time to time.

XII

'Sir,' saith he, 'Meseemeth you are not over joyous.' 'Certes, Sir,' saith the knight, 'I have no right to be, for a certain man slew mine own brother towards the Deep Forest not long since, and no right have I to be glad, for a worshipful man was he and a loyal.' 'Fair Sir,' saith Perceval, 'Know you who slew him?' 'Fair Sir, it was one of Aristot's knights, for that he was sitting upon a horse that had been Aristot's, and whereon another knight had slain him, and a hermit had lent him to my brother for that the Red Knight's lion had maimed his own.' Perceval was little glad of these tidings, for that he had sent him that had been slain on account of the horse. 'Sir,' saith Perceval, 'Your brother had not deserved his death, methinketh, for it was not he that slew the knight.' 'No, Sir, I know it all of a truth, but another, that slew the Red Knight of the Deep Forest.' Perceval was silent thereupon. He lay the night at the hostel and was harboured right well, and on the morrow departed when he had taken leave. He wandered until he came to a hermitage there where he heard mass. After the service, the hermit came to him and said: 'Sir,' saith he, 'In this forest are knights all armed that are keeping watch for the knight that slew Aristot and the Red Knight and his lion as well.

Wherefore they meet no knight in this forest but they are minded to slay him for the knight that slew these twain.' 'Sir,' saith Perceval, 'God keep me from meeting such folk as would do me evil.' **Perceval slayeth two knights**

XIII

With that he departed from the hermitage and took leave of the hermit, and rideth until that he is come into the forest and espieth the knight that sitteth on Aristot's horse for that he hath slain the other knight. A second knight was with him. They abide when they see Perceval. 'By my head,' saith one of them, 'This same shield bare he that slew Aristot, as it was told us, and, like enough, it may be he.' They come toward him, full career. Perceval seeth them coming, and forgetteth not his spurs, but rather cometh against them the speediest he may. The two knights smote him upon the shield and brake their spears. Perceval overtaketh him that sitteth on Aristot's horse and thrusteth an ell's length of his spear through his body and so overthroweth him dead.

XIV

After that, he cometh to the other knight, that fain would have fled, and smiteth off the shoulder close to his side, and he fell dead by the side of the other. He taketh both twain of their destriers, and knotteth the reins together and driveth them before him as far as the house of the hermit, that had issued forth of his hermitage. He delivered to him the horse of

Perceval sore needed

Aristot, and the other of the knight that he had sent thither. 'Sir,' saith Perceval, 'Well I know that and you shall see any knight that hath need of it and shall ask you, you will lend him one of these horses, for great courtesy is it to aid a worshipful man when one seeth him in misfortune.' 'Sir,' saith the hermit, 'But now since, were here three knights. So soon as they knew that the two were dead whose horses you have delivered to me, they departed, fleeing the speediest they might. I praised them much of their going, and told them they did well not to die on such occasion, for that the souls of knights that die under arms are nigher to Hell than Paradise.'

XV

Perceval, that never was without sore toil and travail so long as he lived, departed from the hermitage and went with great diligence right through the midst of the forest, and met a knight that came a great gallop over against him. He knew Perceval by the shield that he bare. 'Sir,' saith he, 'I come from the Castle of the Black Hermit, there where you will find the Damsel of the Car as soon as you arrive, wherefore she sendeth you word by me that you speed your way and go to her to ask for the chess-board that was taken away from before Messire Gawain, or otherwise never again will you enter into the castle you have won. Sir,' saith he, 'Haste, moreover, on account of a thing most pitiful that I heard in this forest. I heard how a knight was leading a damsel against her will,

beating her with a great scourge. I passed by the launde on the one side and he on the other, so that I espied him through the underwood that was between us; but it seemed me that the damsel was bemoaning her for the son of the Widow Lady that had given her back her castle, and the knight said that for love of him he would put her into the Serpent's pit. An old knight and a priest went after the knight to pray him have mercy on the damsel, but so cruel is he, that so far from doing so, he rather waxed sore wroth for that they prayed it of him, and made cheer and semblant as though he would have slain them.' The knight departeth from Perceval and taketh leave, and Perceval goeth along the way that the knight had come, thinking that he would go after the damsel, for he supposeth certainly that it is she to whom he gave back her castle, and would fain know what knight it is that entreateth her in such fashion. He hath ridden until he is come into the deepest of the forest and the thickest. He bideth awhile and listeneth and heareth the voice of the damsel, that was in a great valley where the Serpent's pit was, wherein the knight was minded to set her. She cried right loud for mercy, and wept, and the knight gave her great strokes of the scourge to make her be still. Perceval had no will to tarry longer, but rather cometh thither as fast as he may.

A churlish knight

XVI

So soon as the damsel seeth Perceval, she knoweth him again. She claspeth her two

The Serpent's Pit

hands together and saith, 'Ha, Sir, for God's sake have mercy! Already have you given me back the castle whereof this knight would reave me.' The horse whereon Perceval sat, the knight knew him. 'Sir,' saith he, 'This horse was the horse of Messire the Red Knight of the Deep Forest! Now at last know I that it was you that slew him!' 'It may well be,' saith Perceval, 'And if that I slew him, good right had I to do so, for he had cut off the head of a son of mine uncle, the which head this damsel carried of a long time.' 'By my head,' saith the knight, 'Sith that you slew him, you are my mortal enemy!' So he draweth off in the midst of the launde and Perceval likewise, and then they come together as fast as their horses may carry them, and either giveth other great buffets in the midst of their breast with their spears the most they may. Perceval smiteth the knight so passing hard that he overthroweth him to the ground right over the croup of his horse, and in the fall that he made, he to-brake him the master-bone of his leg so that he might not move. And Perceval alighteth to the ground and cometh where the knight lay. And he crieth him mercy that he slay him not. And Perceval telleth him he need not fear death, nor that he is minded to slay him in such plight as he is, but that like as he was fain to make the damsel do he will make him do. He maketh alight the other old knight and the priest, then maketh the knight be carried to the Pit of the Serpent and the worms, whereof was great store. The pit was dark and deep.

When that the knight was therein he might not live long for the worms that were there. The damsel thanked Perceval much of this goodness and of the other that he had done her. She departeth and returneth again to her castle, and was assured therein on all sides, nor never thereafter had she dread of no knight, for the cruel justice that Perceval had done on this one. An evil believe

XVII

The son of the Widow Lady of his good knighthood knoweth not how to live without travail. He well knoweth that when he hath been at the Black Hermit's castle, he will in some measure have achieved his task. But many another thing behoveth him to do tofore, and little toil he thinketh it, whereof shall God be well pleased. He hath ridden so far one day and another, that he came into a land where he met knights stout and strong there where God was neither believed in nor loved, but where rather they adored false images and false Lord-Gods and devils that made themselves manifest. He met a knight at the entrance of a forest. 'Ha, Sir!' saith he to Perceval, 'Return you back! No need is there for you to go further, for the folk of this island are not well-believers in God. I may not pass through the land but by truce only. The Queen of this land was sister of the King of Oriande, that Lancelot killed in the battle and all his folk, and seized his land, wherein all the folk were misbelievers. Now throughout all the

Queen Jandree land they believe in the Saviour of the World. Thereof is she passing sorrowful, and hateth all them that believe in the New Law, insomuch as that she would not look upon any that believed, and prayed to her gods that never might she see none until such time as the New Law should be overthrown; and God, that hath power to do this, blinded her forthwith. Now she supposeth that the false gods wherein she believeth have done this, and saith that when the New Law shall fall, she will have her sight again by the renewal of these gods, and by their virtue, nor, until this hour, hath she no desire to see. And I tell you this,' saith the knight, 'because I would not that you should go thither as yet, for that I misdoubt of your being troubled thereby.' 'Sir, gramercy,' saith Perceval, 'But no knighthood is there so fair as that which is undertaken to set forward the Law of God, and for Him ought one to make better endeavour than for all other. In like manner as He put His body in pain and travail for us, so ought each to put his own for Him.' He departeth from the knight, and was right joyous of this that he heard him say that Lancelot had won a kingdom wherein he had done away the false Law. But and he knew the tidings that the King had put him in prison, he would not have been glad at all, for Lancelot was of his lineage and was therefore good knight, and for this he loved him right well.

XVIII

The Raving Castle

Perceval rideth until nightfall, and findeth a great castle fortified with a great drawbridge, and there were tall ancient towers within. He espied at the door a squire that had the weight of a chain on his neck, and at the other end the chain was fixed to a great bulk of iron. The chain was as long as the length of the bridge. Then cometh he over against Perceval when he seeth him coming. 'Sir,' saith he, 'Meseemeth you believe in God?' 'Fair friend, so do I, the best I may.' 'Sir, for God's sake, enter not this castle!' 'Wherefore, fair friend?' saith Perceval. 'Sir,' saith he, 'I will tell you. I am Christian, even as are you, and I am thrall within there and guard this gate, as you see. But it is the most cruel castle that I know, and it is called the Raving Castle. There be three knights within there, full young and comely, but so soon as they see a knight of the New Law, forthwith are they out of their senses, and all raving mad, so that nought may endure between them. Moreover, there is within one of the fairest damsels that saw I ever. She guardeth the knights so soon as they begin to rave, and so much they dread her that they durst not disobey her commandment in aught that she willeth, for many folk would they evilly entreat were it not for her. And for that I am their thrall they put up with me, and I have no fear of them, but many is the Christian knight that hath come in hither that never hath issued hence.' 'Fair sweet friend,'

Three brothers

saith Perceval, 'I will enter in thither and I may, for I should not know this day how to go elsewhither, and true it is that greater power hath God than the devil.' He entereth into the castle and alighteth in the midst of the courtyard.

XIX

The damsel was at the windows of the hall, that was of passing great beauty. She cometh down as soon as she may, and seeth Perceval come in and the cross on his shield, and knoweth well thereby that he is Christian. 'Ha, Sir, for God's sake,' saith she, 'Come not up above, for there be three of the comeliest knights that ever were seen that are playing at tables and at dice in a chamber, and they are brothers-german. They will all go out of their senses so soon as they shall see you!'

XX

'Damsel,' saith Perceval, 'Please God, so shall they not, and such a miracle is good to see, for it is only right that all they who will not believe in God should be raving mad when they see the things that come of Him.' Perceval goeth up into the hall, all armed, for all that the damsel saith. She followeth him as fast as she may. The three knights espied Perceval all armed and the cross on his shield, and forthwith leapt up and were beside themselves. They rolled their eyes and tore themselves and roared like devils. There were axes and swords in the hall that they go to lay hold on, and they are fain to leap upon Perceval,

but no power have they to do so, for such was the will of God. When they saw that they might not come a-nigh him, they ran either on other and so slew themselves between them, nor would they stint their fighting together for the damsel. Perceval beheld the miracle of these folks that were thus killed, and the damsel that made right great dole thereof. 'Ha, damsel,' saith he, 'Weep not, but repent you of this false believe, for they that are unwilling to believe in God shall die like mad folks and devils!' Perceval made the squires that were there within bear the bodies out of the hall, and made them be cast into a running water, and straightway slew all the other, for that they were not minded to believe. The castle was all emptied of the misbelieving folk save only the damsel and those that waited upon her, and the Christian thrall that guarded the gate. Perceval set him forth of the chain, then led him up into the hall and made him disarm him. He found sundry right rich robes. The damsel, that was of right great beauty, looked at him and saw that he was a full comely knight, and well pleased she was with him. She honoured him in right great sort, but she might not forget the three knights that were her brothers, and made sore dole for them.

slay each other

XXI

'Damsel,' saith Perceval, 'Nought availeth it to make this dole, but take comfort on some other manner.' Perceval looked at the hall from one end to the other and saw that it was

A damsel loveth

A right rich, and the damsel, in whom was full great beauty, stinted of making dole to look at Perceval. She seeth that he is comely knight and gentle and tall and well furnished of good conditions, wherefore he pleaseth her much, and forthwith beginneth she to love him, and saith to herself that, so he would leave his God for the god in whom she believed, right glad would she be thereof, and would make him lord of her castle, for it seemed her that better might she not bestow it, and, sith that her brothers are dead, there may be no bringing of them back, and therefore better would it be to forget her dole. But little knew she Perceval's thought, for had she known that which he thinketh, she would have imagined not this; for, and had she been Christian he might not have been drawn to love her in such sort as she thinketh, sith that Josephus telleth us that never did he lose his virginity for woman, but rather died virgin and chaste and clean of his body. In this mind was she still, nor never might she refrain her heart from him. Thinketh she rather that, and he knew she was minded to love him, right joyous would he be thereof, for that she is of so passing beauty. Perceval asketh the damsel what she hath in her thought? 'Sir,' saith she, 'Nought think I but only good and you will.' 'Damsel,' saith Perceval, 'Never, please God, shall there be hindrance of me but that you renounce this evil Law and believe in the good.' 'Sir,' saith she, 'Do you renounce yours for love of me, and I will do your commandment and your will.'

XXII

Perceval well

'Damsel,' saith Perceval, 'Nought availeth to tell me this. Were you man like as you are woman, your end would have come with the others. But, please God, your tribulation shall lend itself to good.' 'Sir,' saith she, 'So you are willing to promise me that you will love me like as knight ought to love damsel, I am well inclined to believe in your God.' 'Damsel, I promise you as I am a Christian that so you are willing to receive baptism, I will love you as he that firmly believeth in God ought to love damsel.' 'Sir,' saith she, 'I ask no more of you.' She biddeth send for a holy man, a hermit that was in the forest appurtenant, and right gladly came he when he heard the tidings. They held her up and baptized her, both her and her damsels with her. Perceval held her at the font. Josephus witnesseth us in this history that she had for name Celestre. And great joy made she of her baptism, and her affections turned she to good. The hermit remained there with her, and taught her to understand the firm believe, and did the service of Our Lord. The damsel was of right good life and right holy, and ended thereafter in many good works.

XXIII

Perceval departed from the castle, and gave thanks to Our Lord and praise, that He hath allowed him to conquer a castle so cruel and to attorn it to the Law. He went his way a great pace, all armed, until he came into a country

Queen Jandree wherein was great grief being made, and the more part said that he was come that should destroy their Law, for that already had he won their strongest castle. He is come towards an ancient castle that was at the head of a forest. He looketh and seeth at the entrance of the gateway a full great throng of folk. He seeth a squire come forth thence, and asketh him to whom belongeth the castle. 'Sir,' saith he, 'It is Queen Jandree's, that hath made her be brought before her gate with the folk you see yonder, for she hath heard tell how the knights of the Raving Castle are dead, and another knight that hath conquered the castle hath made the damsel be baptized, wherefore much she marvelleth how this may be. She is in much dread of losing her land, for her brother Madeglant of Oriande is dead, so that she may no longer look to none for succour, and she hath been told how the knight that conquered the Raving Castle is the Best Knight of the World, and that none may endure against him. For this doubtance and fear of him she is minded to go to one of her own castles that is somewhat stronger.' Perceval departeth from the squire and rideth until they that were at the entrance of the gateway espied him. They saw the Red Cross that he bare on his shield, and said to the Queen, 'Lady, a Christian knight is coming into this castle.' 'Take heed,' saith she, 'that it be not he that is about to overthrow our Law!' Perceval cometh thither and alighteth, and cometh before the Queen all armed. The Queen asketh what he seeketh.

XXIV

welcometh Perceval

'Lady,' saith he, 'Nought seek I save good only to yourself so you hinder it not.' 'You come,' saith she, 'from the Raving Castle, there where three brothers are slain, whereof is great loss.' 'Lady,' saith he, 'At that castle was I, and now fain would I that your own were at the will of Jesus Christ, in like manner as is that.' 'By my head,' saith she, 'And your Lord hath so great power as is said, so will it be.' 'Lady, His virtue and His puissance are far greater than they say.' 'That would I fain know,' saith she, 'presently, and I am fain to pray you that you depart not from me until that it hath been proven.' Perceval granteth it gladly. She returned into her castle and Perceval with her. When he was alighted he went up into the hall. They that were within marvelled them much that she should thus give consent, for never, sithence that she had been blind, might she allow no knight of the New Law to be so nigh her, and made slay all them that came into her power, nor might she never see clear so long as she had one of them before her. Now is her disposition altered in such sort as that she would fain she might see clear him that hath come in, for she hath been told that he is the comeliest knight of the world and well seemeth to be as good as they witness of him.

XXV

Perceval remained there gladly for that he saw the lady's cruelty was somewhat slackened,

The Queen seeth clear

and it seemed him that it would be great joy and she were willing to turn to God, and they that are within there, for well he knoweth that so she should hold to the New Law, all they of the land would be of the same mind. When Perceval had lain the night at the castle, the Lady on the morrow sent for all the more powerful of her land, and came forth of her chamber into the hall where Perceval was, seeing as clear as ever she had seen aforetime. 'Lords,' saith she, 'Hearken ye all, for now will I tell you the truth like as it hath befallen me. I was lying in my bed last night, and well know ye that I saw not a whit, and made my orisons to our gods that they would restore me my sight. It seemed me they made answer that they had no power so to do, but that I should make be slain the knight that was arrived here, and that and I did not, sore wroth would they be with me. And when I had heard their voices say that nought might they avail me as for that I had prayed of them, I remembered me of the Lord in whom they that hold the New Law believe. I prayed Him right sweetly that, and so it were that He had such virtue and such puissance as many said, He would make me see clear, so as that I might believe in Him. At that hour I fell on sleep, and meseemed that I saw one of the fairest Ladies in the world, and she was delivered of a Child therewithin, and He had about Him a great brightness of light like it were the sun shone at right noonday.

XXVI

The Queen's visions

'When the Child was born, so passing fair was He and so passing gentle and of so sweet semblant that the looks of Him pleased me well; and meseemed that at His deliverance there was a company of folk the fairest that were seen ever, and they were like as it had been birds and made full great joy. And methought that an ancient man that was with Her, told me that My Lady had lost no whit of her maidenhood for the Child. Well pleased was I the while this thing lasted me. It seemed me that I saw it like as I do you. Thereafter, methought I saw a Man bound to a stake, in whom was great sweetness and humility, and an evil folk beat Him with scourges and rods right cruelly, so that the blood ran down thereof. They would have no mercy on Him. Of this might I not hold myself but that I wept for pity of Him. Therewithal I awoke and marvelled much whence it should come and what it might be. But in anyway it pleased me much that I had seen it. It seemed me after this, that I saw the same Man that had been bound to the stake set upon a cross, and nailed thereon right grievously and smitten in the side with a spear, whereof had I such great pity that needs must I weep of the sore pain that I saw Him suffer. I saw the Lady at the feet of the cross, and knew her again that I had seen delivered of the Child, but none might set in writing the great dole that she made. On the other side of the cross was a man that

The Graal

seemed not joyful, but he recomforted the Lady the fairest he might. And another folk were there that collected His blood in a most holy Vessel that one of them held for it.

XXVII

'Afterward, methought I saw Him taken down of hanging on the cross, and set in a sepulchre of stone. Thereof had I great pity, for, so long as meseemed I saw Him thus, never might I withhold me from weeping. And so soon as the pity came into my heart, and the tears into my eyes, I had my sight even as you see. In such a Lord as this ought one to believe, for He suffered death when He might lightly have avoided it had He so willed, but He did it to save His people. In this Lord I will that ye all believe, and so renounce our false gods, for they be devils and therefore may not aid us nor avail us. And he that will not believe, him will I make be slain or die a shameful death.' The Lady made her be held up and baptized, and all them that would not do the same she made be destroyed and banished. This history telleth us that her name was Salubre. She was good lady and well believed in God, and so holy life led she thereafter that in a hermitage she died. Perceval departed from the castle right joyous in his heart of the Lady and her people that believed in the New Law.

BRANCH XXXIII

TITLE I

AFTERWARD, this title telleth us that Meliot of Logres was departed from Castle Perilous sound and whole, by virtue of the sword that Lancelot had brought him, and of the cloth that he took in the Chapel Perilous. But sore sorrowful was he of the tidings he had heard that Messire Gawain was in prison and he knew not where, but he had been borne on hand that two knights that were kinsmen of them of the Raving Castle that had slain one another, had shut him in prison on account of Perceval that had won the castle. Now, saith Meliot of Logres, never shall he have ease again until he knoweth where Messire Gawain is. He rideth amidst a forest, and prayeth God grant him betimes to hear witting of Messire Gawain. The forest was strange and gloomy. He rode until nightfall but might not find neither hold nor hermitage. He looketh right amidst the forest before him and seeth a damsel sitting that bemoaneth herself full sore. The moon was dark and the place right foul of seeming and the forest gloomy of shadow. 'Ha, damsel, and what do you here at this hour?' 'Sir,' saith she, 'I may not amend it, the more is my sorrow. For the place is more perilous than you think. Look,' saith she,

Meliot of Logres

Two knights hanging

'up above, and you will see the occasion wherefore I am here.' Meliot looketh and seeth two knights all armed hanging up above the damsel's head. Thereof much marvelleth he. 'Ha, damsel,' saith he, 'Who slew these knights so foully?' 'Sir,' saith she, 'The Knight of the Galley that singeth in the sea.' 'And wherefore hath he hanged them in such wise?' 'For this,' saith she, 'that they believed in God and His sweet Mother. And so behoveth me to watch them here for forty days, that none take them down of hanging, for and they were taken hence he would lose his castle, he saith, and would cut off my head.' 'By my head,' saith Meliot, 'Such watch is foul shame to damsel, and no longer shall you remain here.' 'Ha, Sir,' saith the damsel, 'Then shall I be a dead woman, for he is of so great cruelty that none scarce might protect me against him.'

II

'Damsel,' saith Meliot, 'Foul shame would it be and I left here these knights in such wise for the reproach of other knights.' Meliot made them graves with his sword, and so buried them the best he might. 'Sir,' saith the damsel, 'And you take not thought to protect me, the knight will slay me. To-morrow, when he findeth not the knights, he will search all the forest to look for me.' Meliot and the damsel together go their way through the forest until they come to a chapel where was wont to be a hermit that the Knight

of the Galley had destroyed. He helpeth down the damsel of his horse, and afterward they entered into the chapel, where was a great brightness of light, and a damsel was there that kept watch over a dead knight. Meliot marvelleth him much. 'Damsel,' saith Meliot, 'When was this knight killed?' 'Sir, yesterday the Knight of the Galley slew him on the sea-shore, wherefore behoveth me thus keep watch, and in the morning will he come hither or ever he go to the castle where Messire Gawain hath to-morrow to fight with a lion, all unarmed, and my Lady, that is mistress both of me and of this damsel you have brought hither, will likewise be brought to-morrow to the place where the lion is to slay Messire Gawain, and she in like sort will be afterward delivered to the lion and she renounce not the New Law wherein the knight that came from Raving Castle, whereof she is lady, hath made her believe; and we ourselves shall be in like manner devoured along with her. But this damsel would still have taken respite of my death and she had still kept guard over the knights that were so foully hanged above her. Natheless, sith that you have taken them down from where they were hanging, you have done a right good deed, whatsoever betide, for the Lord of the Red Tower will give his castle to the knight for this.' Meliot is right joyous of the tidings that he hath heard of Messire Gawain that he is still on live, for well knoweth he, sith that the Knight of the Galley will come by the chapel there, that he will come thither or ever

Tidings of Gawain

The Knight of the Galley

Messire Gawain doth battle with the lion.

'Sir,' saith the damsel of the chapel, 'For God's sake, take this damsel to a place of safety, for the knight will be so wood mad of wrath and despite so soon as he cometh hither, that he will be fain to smite off her head forthwith, and of yourself also have I great fear.'

III

'Damsel,' saith Meliot, 'The knight is but a man like as am I.' 'Yea, Sir, but stronger is he and more cruel than seem you to be.' Meliot was in the chapel the night until the morrow, and heard the knight coming like a tempest, and he brought with him the lady of the castle and reviled her from time to time, and Meliot seeth him come, and a dwarf that followeth after him a great pace. He crieth out to him: 'Sir, behold there the disloyal knight through whom you have lost your castle. Now haste! Avenge yourself of him! After that will we go to the death of Messire Gawain?' Meliot, so soon as he espieth him, mounteth and maketh his arms ready. 'Is it you,' saith the Knight of the Galley, 'that hath trespassed on my demesne and taken down my knights?' 'By my head, yours were they not! Rather were they the knights of God, and foul outrage have you done herein when you slew them so shamefully.' He goeth toward the knight without more words, and smiteth him so passing strong amidst the breast that he pierceth the habergeon and thrusteth all the iron of his spear into his body

and afterward draweth it back to him with a great wrench. And the knight smiteth him so hard on his shield that he maketh an ell's length pass beyond, for right wroth was he that he was wounded. The dwarf crieth to him, 'Away, then! The knight endureth against you that have slain so many of them!' The Knight of the Galley waxeth wood wrath. He taketh his career, and cometh as fast as his horse may carry him, and smiteth Meliot so strongly that he breaketh his spear in such sort that he maketh both him and his horse stagger. But Meliot catcheth him better, for he thrusteth the spear right through his body and hurleth against him at the by-passing with such stoutness and force that he maketh him fall dead to the ground from his horse. The dwarf thought to escape, but Meliot smote off his head, whereof the damsels gave him great thanks, for many a mischief had he wrought them. Meliot slayeth him

IV

Meliot buried the knight that he found in the chapel dead, then told the damsels that he might abide no longer, but would go succour Messire Gawain and he might. The damsels were horsed to their will, for one had the horse of the knight that was slain and the other the horse of the dwarf. The other damsel was come upon a mule, and they said that they would go back, for the country was made all safe by the death of the knight. They thanked Meliot much, for they say truly that he hath rescued them from death. Meliot departeth from the

Gawain in sore peril

damsels and goeth right amidst the forest as he that would most fain hear tidings of Messire Gawain. When he had ridden of a long space, he met a knight that was coming all armed at a great pace. 'Sir Knight,' saith he to Meliot, 'Can you tell me tidings of the Knight of the Galley?' 'What have you to do therein?' saith Meliot. 'Sir, the Lord of the Red Tower hath made bring Messire Gawain into a launde of this forest, and there, all unarmed, must he do battle with a lion. So my lord is waiting for the Knight of the Galley, that is to bring two damsels thither that the lion will devour when he shall have slain Messire Gawain.' 'Will the battle be presently?' saith Meliot. 'Yea, Sir,' saith the knight, 'Soon enough betimes, for Messire Gawain hath already been led thither and there bound to a stake until such time as the lion shall be come. Then will he be unbound, but even then two knights all armed will keep watch on him. But tell me tidings of the Knight of the Galley, and you have seen him?' 'Go forward,' saith he, 'and you will hear tidings of him.' Meliot departeth thereupon, a great gallop, and cometh nigh the launde whereunto Messire Gawain had been brought. He espied the two knights that kept guard over him, and if that Messire Gawain were in fear, little marvel was it, for he thought that his end had come. Meliot espied him bound to an iron staple with cords about the body on all sides so that he might not move. Meliot hath great pity thereof in his heart, and saith to himself that he will die there sooner than Messire Gawain shall die. He

clappeth spurs to his horse when he cometh nigh the knights, and overtaketh one of them with such a rush that he thrusteth his spear right through his body, and beareth him down dead. The other was fain to go to the castle for succour when he saw his fellow dead. Meliot slew him forthwith. He cometh to Messire Gawain, and so unbindeth him and cutteth the cords wherewith he is bound. 'Sir,' saith he, 'I am Meliot of Logres, your knight.' **Meliot rescueth Gawain**

V

When Messire Gawain felt himself unbound, no need to ask whether he had joy thereof. The tidings were come to the Red Court that Queen Jandree was christened and baptized, and that the Knight was come that had such force and puissance in him that none might endure against him for the God in whom he believed, and they knew likewise that the Knight of the Galley was dead, and Messire Gawain unbound and the knights that guarded him slain. They say that there may they not abide, so they depart from the castle and say that they will cross the sea to protect their bodies, for that there they may have no safety.

VI

When Meliot had delivered Messire Gawain he made him be armed with the arms, such as they were, of one of the knights he had slain. Messire Gawain mounted on a horse such as pleased him, and right great joy had he at heart. They marvel much how it is that they of the castle have not come after them, but they know

Perceval and his ship

not their thought nor how they are scared 'Meliot,' saith Messire Gawain, 'You have delivered me from death this time and one other, nor never had I acquaintance with any knight that hath done so much for me in so short a time as have you.' They departed the speediest they might and rode nigh enow to the castle, but they heard none moving within nor any noise, nor saw they none issue forth, and much marvelled they that none should come after them. They rode until they came to the head of the forest and caught sight of the sea, that was nigh enough before them, and saw that there was a great clashing of arms at the brink of the sea. A single knight was doing battle with all them that would fain have entered into a ship, and held stour so stiffly against them that he toppled the more part into the sea. They went thither as fast as they might, and when they drew nigh to the ship they knew that it was Perceval by his arms and his shield. Or ever they reached it, the ship was put off into the midst of the sea, wherein he was launched of his own great hardiment, and they went on fighting against him within the ship. 'Meliot,' saith Messire Gawain, 'See you, there is Perceval the Good Knight, and now may we say of a truth that he is in sore peril of death; for that ship, save God bethink Him thereof, shall arrive in such manner and in such a place as that never more shall we have no witting of him, and, so he perish for ever, no knight on live may have power to set forward the Law of our Lord.'

VII

Evil tidings of Lancelot

Messire Gawain seeth the ship going further away, and Perceval that defendeth himself therein against them that set upon him. Right heavy is he that he came not sooner, or ever the ship had put off from the land. He turneth back, he and Meliot together, and right sorrowful was Messire Gawain of Perceval, for they knew not in what land he might arrive, and, might he have followed, right gladly would he have gone after him to aid him. They have ridden until they meet a knight. Messire Gawain asketh him whence he cometh, and he saith from King Arthur's court. 'What tidings can you tell us thereof?' saith Messire Gawain. 'Sir, bad enough!' saith he. 'King Arthur hath neglected all his knights for Briant of the Isles, and hath put one of his best knights in prison.' 'What is his name?' saith Messire Gawain. 'Sir, he is called Lancelot of the Lake. He had reconquered all the islands that had been reft of King Arthur, and slain King Madeglant, and conquered the land of Oriande that he turned to the belief of the Saviour of the World, and, so soon as he had conquered his enemies, King Arthur sent for him forthwith and straightway put him in his prison by the counsel of Briant of the Isles. But King Arthur will have a surfeit of friends betimes; for King Claudas hath assembled his folk in great plenty to reconquer the kingdom of Oriande and come back upon King Arthur by the counsel of Briant of the Isles that betrayeth

Arthur is blamed

the King, for he hath made him his Seneschal and commander of all his land.' 'Sir Knight,' saith Messire Gawain, 'Needs must the King miscarry that setteth aside the counsel of his good knights for the leasings of a traitor.' Thereupon the knight departed from Messire Gawain. Right heavy is he of this that he hath said, that the King hath put Lancelot in prison. Never tofore did he aught whereby he wrought so much to blame.

BRANCH XXXIV

TITLE I

HEREUPON the story is silent of Messire Gawain and Meliot, and speaketh of King Claudas that hath assembled a great folk by the counsel of Briant of the Isles to come into the land of King Arthur, for he knoweth that it is disgarnished of the good knights that wont there to be, and he knoweth all the secret plottings of the court and what power King Arthur hath withal. He draweth toward his land the nighest he may, and hath won back the kingdom of Oriande all at his will. But they of Albanie still hold against him and challenge the land the best they may. Tidings thereof come to the court of King Arthur, and they of the country send him word that so he send them not succour betimes they will yield up the land to King Claudas, and oftentimes they long after Lancelot, and say that so they had a defender like him, the islands would be all at peace. The King sent Briant of the Isles thither many times, that ever incontinent returned thence discomfit, but never sent he thither him that should have power to protect the land against King Claudas. King Arthur was sore troubled, for no witting had he of Messire Gawain nor Messire Ywain nor of others whereby his court had use of right to be feared and dreaded and

Of King Claudas

Lucan the Butler

of high renown throughout all other kingdoms. The King was one day in the hall at Cardoil, right heavy; and he was at one of the windows, and remembered him of the Queen and of his good knights that he wont to see oftener at court, whereof the more part were dead, and of the adventures that wont to befall therein whereof they saw none no longer. Lucan the Butler seeth him right heavy and draweth nigh to him quietly.

II

'Sir,' saith he, 'Meseemeth you are without joy.' 'Lucan,' saith the King, 'Joy hath been somewhat far from me sithence that the Queen hath been dead, and Gawain and the other knights have held aloof from my court so that they deign come hither no longer. Moreover, King Claudas warreth upon me and conquereth my lands so that no power have I to rescue me for default of my knights.' 'Sir,' saith Lucan, 'Herein is there nought whereof you have right to accuse any save yourself alone. For you have done evil to him that hath served you, and good to them that are traitors to you. You have one of the best knights in the world and the most loyal in your prison, wherefore all the other hold them aloof from your court. Lancelot had served you well by his good will and by his good knighthood, nor never had he done you any disservice whereof you might in justice have done him such shame; nor never will your enemies withhold them from you nor have dread of you save only through him and

other your good knights. And know of a truth that Lancelot and Messire Gawain are the best of your court.' 'Lucan,' saith King Arthur, 'So thought I ever again to have affiance in him, I would make him be set forth of my prison, for well I know that I have wrought discourteously toward him; and Lancelot is of a great heart, wherefore would he not slacken of his despite for that which hath been done unto him until such time as he should be avenged thereof, for no king is there in the world, how puissant soever he be, against whom he durst not well maintain his right.'

pleadeth for Lancelot

III

'Sir,' saith Lucan, 'Lancelot well knoweth that and you had taken no counsel but your own, he would not have been thus entreated, and I dare well say that never so long as he liveth will he misdo in aught towards you, for he hath in him much valour and loyalty, as many a time have you had good cause to know. Wherefore, and you would fain have aid and succour and hold your realm again, behoveth you set him forth of the prison, or otherwise never will you succeed herein, and, if you do not so, you will lose your land by treason.' The King held by the counsel of Lucan the Butler. He made bring Lancelot before him into the midst of the hall, that was somewhat made lean of his being in prison, but he bore him as he wont, nor might none look at him to whom he seemed not to be good knight. 'Lancelot,' saith the King, 'How is it with

Lancelot set free

you?' 'Sir,' saith he, 'It hath been ill with me long time, but, please God, it shall be better hereafter.' 'Lancelot,' saith the King, 'I repent me of this that I have done to you, and I have bethought me much of the good services I have found in you, wherefore I will do you amends thereof at your will, in such sort as that the love between us shall be whole as it was tofore.'

IV

'Sir,' saith Lancelot, 'Your amends love I much, and your love more than of any other; but never, please God, will I misdo you for aught that you may have done to me, for it is well known that I have not been in prison for no treason I have done, nor for no folly, but only for that it was your will. Never will it be reproached me as of shame, and, sith that you have done me nought whereof I may have blame nor reproach, my devoir it is to withhold me from hating you; for you are my lord, and if that you do me ill, without flattery of myself the ill you do me is your own; but, please God, whatsoever you have done me, never shall my aid fail you, rather, everywhere will I set my body in adventure for your love, in like sort as I have done many a time.'

V

In the court of King Arthur was right great joy of the most part when they heard that Lancelot was set forth of prison, but not a

whit rejoiced were Briant and his folk. The King commanded that Lancelot should be well cared for and made whole again, and that all should be at his commandment. The court was all overjoyed thereof, and they said: now at last might the King make war in good assurance. Lancelot was foremost in the King's court and more redoubted than was ever another of the knights. Briant of the Isles came one day before the King. 'Sir,' saith he, 'Behold, here is Lancelot that wounded me in your service, wherefore I will that he know I am his enemy.' 'Briant,' saith Lancelot, 'And if that you deserved it tofore, well may you be sorry thereof, and sith that you wish to be mine enemy, your friend will I not be. For well may I deem of your love according as I have found it in you.' 'Sir,' saith Briant to the King, 'You are my lord, and I am one you are bound to protect. You know well that so rich am I in lands and so puissant in friends that I may well despise mine enemy, nor will I not remain at your court so long as Lancelot is therein. Say not that I depart thence with any shame as toward myself. Rather thus go I hence as one that will gladly avenge me, so I have place and freedom, and I see plainly and know that you and your court love him far better than you love me, wherefore behoveth me take thought thereof.' 'Briant,' saith the King, 'Remain as yet, and I will make amends for you to Lancelot, and I myself will make amends for him to you.'

Briant fain to depart

Briant and Claudas

VI

'Sir,' saith Briant, 'By the faith that I owe to you, none amends will I have of him nor other until such time as I have drawn as much blood of his body as did he of mine, and I will well that he know it.' With that Briant departeth from the court all wrathful, but if that Lancelot had not feared to anger the King, Briant would not have ridden a league English or ever he had followed and forced him to fight. Briant goeth toward the Castle of the Hard Rock, and saith that better would it have been for the King that Lancelot were still in prison, for that such a plea will he move against him and he may bring it to bear, as that he shall lose thereof the best parcel of his land. He is gone into the land of King Claudas, and saith that now at last hath he need of his aid, for Lancelot is issued forth of the King's prison and is better loved at court than all other, so that the King believeth in no counsel save his only. King Claudas sweareth to him and maketh pledge that never will he fail him, and Briant to him again.

BRANCH XXXV

TITLE I

HEREWITHAL is the story silent of Briant and talketh of Perceval, that the ship beareth away right swiftly; but so long hath he held battle therein that every one hath he slain of them that were in the ship save only the pilot that steereth her, for him hath he in covenant that he will believe in God and renounce his evil Law. Perceval is far from land so that he seeth nought but sea only, and the ship speedeth onward, and God guideth him, as one that believeth in Him and loveth Him and serveth Him of a good heart. The ship ran on by night and by day as it pleased God, until that they saw a castle and an island of the sea. He asked his pilot if he knew what castle it was. 'Certes,' saith he, 'Not I, for so far have we run that I know not neither the sea nor the stars.' They come nigh the castle, and saw four that sounded bells at the four corners of the town, right sweetly, and they that sounded them were clad in white garments. They are come thither. Perceval voyageth

II

So soon as the ship had taken haven under the castle, the sea withdraweth itself back, so that the ship is left on dry land. None were

Perceval therein save Perceval, his horse, and the pilot.
seeth They issued forth of the ship and went by the side of the sea toward the castle, and therein were the fairest halls and the fairest mansions that any might see ever. He looketh underneath a tree that was tall and broad and seeth the fairest fountain and the clearest that any may devise, and it was all surrounded of rich pillars, and the gravel thereof seemed to be gold and precious stones. Above this fountain were two men sitting, their beards and hair whiter than driven snow, albeit they seemed young of visage. So soon as they saw Perceval they dressed them to meet him, and bowed down and worshipped the shield that he bare at his neck, and kissed the cross and then the boss wherein were the hallows. 'Sir,' say they, 'Marvel not of this that we do, for well knew we the knight that bare this shield tofore you. Many a time we saw him or ever God were crucified.' Perceval marvelleth much of this that they say, for they talk of a time that is long agone.

III

'Lords, know ye then how he was named?' Say they, 'Joseph of Abarimacie, but no cross was there on the shield before the death of Jesus Christ. But he had it set thereon after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ for the sake of the Saviour that he loved so well.' Perceval took off the shield from his neck, and one of the worshipful men setteth upon it as it were a posy of herbs that was blooming with the

fairest flowers in the world. Perceval looketh beyond the fountain and seeth in a right fair place a round vessel like as it were ivory, and it was so large that there was a knight within, all armed. He looketh thereinto and seeth the knight, and speaketh to him many times, but never the more willeth the knight to answer him. Perceval looketh at him in wonderment, and cometh back to the good men and asketh them who is this knight, and they tell him that he may know not as yet. They lead him to a great hall and bear his shield before him, whereof they make right great joy, and show thereunto great worship. He seeth the hall right rich, for hall so rich and so fair had he seen never. It was hung about with right rich cloths of silk, and in the midst of the hall was imaged the Saviour of the World so as He is in His majesty, with the apostles about Him, and within were great galleries that were full of folk and seemed to be of great holiness, and so were they, for had they not been good men they might not there have remained. many marvels

VI

'Sir,' say the two Masters to Perceval, 'This house that you see here so rich, is the hall royal.' 'By my faith,' saith Perceval, 'So ought it well to be, for never saw I none so much of worth.' He looketh all around, and seeth the richest tables of gold and ivory that he saw ever. One of the Masters clappeth his hands thrice, and three and thirty men come into the hall all in a company. They were clad

A wondrous chain

A in white garments, and not one of them but had a red cross in the midst of his breast, and they seemed to be all of an age. As soon as they enter into the hall they do worship to God Our Lord and set out their cups. Then went they to wash at a great laver of gold, and then went to sit at the tables. The Masters made Perceval sit at the most master-table with themselves. They were served thereat right gloriously, and Perceval looked about him more gladlier than he ate.

V

And while he was thus looking, he seeth a chain of gold come down above him loaded with precious stones, and in the midst thereof was a crown of gold. The chain descended a great length and held on to nought save to the will of Our Lord only. As soon as the Masters saw it descending they opened a great wide pit that was in the midst of the hall, so that one could see the hole all openly. As soon as the entrance of this pit was discovered, there issued thence the greatest cry and most dolorous that any heard ever, and when the worshipful men hear it, they stretched out their hands towards Our Lord and all began to weep. Perceval heareth this dolour, and marvelleth much what it may be. He seeth that the chain of gold descendeth thither and is there stayed until they have well-nigh eaten, and then draweth itself again into the air and so goeth again aloft. But Perceval knoweth not what became thereof, and the Master covereth the pit again, that was right

grisly to see, and pitiful to hear were the voices that issued therefrom. **Perceval his promise**

VI

The Good Men rose from the tables when they had eaten, and gave thanks right sweetly to Our Lord; and then returned thither whence they had come. 'Sir,' saith the Master to Perceval, 'The chain of gold that you have seen is right precious and the crown of gold likewise. But never may you issue forth from hence save you promise to return so soon as you shall see the ship and the sail crossed of a red cross; otherwise may you not depart hence.' 'Tell me,' saith he, 'of the chain of gold and the crown, what it may be?' 'We will tell you not,' saith one of the Masters, 'save you promise that which I tell you.' 'Certes, Sir,' saith Perceval, 'I promise you faithfully, that so soon as I shall have done that I have to do for my lady my mother and one other, that I will return hither, so I be on live and I see your ship so marked as you say.' 'Yea, be you faithful to the end herein, and you shall have the crown of gold upon your head so soon as you return, and so shall you be seated in the throne, and shall be king of an island that is near to this, right plenteous of all things good, for nought is there in the world that is there lacking that is needful for man's body. King Hermit was the king thereof that thus hath garnished it, and for that he approved himself so well in this kingdom, and that they who are in the island consented thereto, is he chosen to be

Plenteous Island

king of a greater realm. Now they desire that another worshipful man be sent them for king, that shall do for them as much good as did he, but take you good heed, sith that you will be king therein, that the island be well garnished; for, and you garnish it not well, you will be put into the Poverty-stricken Island, the crying whereof you have but now since heard, and the crown thereof will again be reft from you. For they that have been kings of the Plenteous Island and have not well approved them, are among the folk that you saw in the Poverty-stricken Island, lacking in all things good. And so I tell you that King Hermit, whom you will succeed, hath sent thither a great part of his folk. There are the heads sealed in silver, and the heads sealed in lead, and the bodies whereunto these heads belonged; I tell you that you must make come thither the head both of the King and of the Queen. But of the other I tell you that they are in the Poverty-stricken Island. But we know not whether they shall ever issue forth thence.'

VII

'Sir,' saith Perceval, 'Tell me of the knight that is all armed in the ivory vessel, who he is, and what is the name of this castle?' 'You may not know,' saith the Master, 'until your return. But tell me tidings of the most Holy Graal, that you reconquered, is it still in the holy chapel that was King Fisherman's?' 'Yea, Sir,' saith Perceval, 'And the sword

wherewith S. John was beheaded, and other hallows in great plenty.' 'I saw the Graal,' saith the Master, 'or ever Joseph, that was uncle to King Fisherman, collected therein the blood of Jesus Christ. Know that well am I acquainted with all your lineage, and of what folk you were born. For your good knighthood and for your good cleanness and for your good valour came you in hither, for such was Our Lord's will, and take heed that you be ready when place shall be, and time shall come, and you shall see the ship apparelled.' 'Sir,' saith Perceval, 'Most willingly shall I return, nor never would I have sought to depart but for my lady my mother, and for my sister, for never have I seen no place that so much hath pleased me.' He was right well harboured the night within, and in the morning, or ever he departed, heard a holy mass in a holy chapel the fairest that he had seen ever. The Master cometh to him after the mass and bringeth him a shield as white as snow. Afterwards, he saith, 'You will leave me your shield within for token of your coming and will bear this.' 'Sir,' saith Perceval, 'I will do your pleasure.' He hath taken leave, and so departeth from the rich mansion, and findeth the ship all apparelled, and heareth sound the bells at his forth-going the same as at his coming. He entereth into the ship and the sail is set. He leaveth the land far behind, and the pilot steereth the ship and Our Lord God guideth and leadeth him. The ship runneth a great speed, for far enough had she to run, but God made her speed as He

Perceval setteth sail

A poor castle

would, for He knew the passing great goodness and worth of the knight that was within.

VIII

God hath guided and led the ship by day and by night until that she arrived at an island where was a castle right ancient, but it seemed not to be over-rich, rather it showed as had it been of great lordship in days of yore. They cast anchor, and Perceval is come toward the castle and entereth in all armed. He seeth the castle large, and the dwelling-chambers fallen down and the house-place roofless, and he seeth a lady sitting before the steps of an old hall. She rose up as soon as she saw him, but she was right poorly clad. It seemed well by her body and her cheer and her bearing that she was a gentlewoman, and he seeth that two damsels come with her that are young of age and are as poorly clad as is the lady. 'Sir,' saith she to Perceval, 'Welcome may you be. No knight have I seen enter this castle of a long time.' 'Lady,' saith Perceval, 'God grant you joy and honour!' 'Sir,' saith she, 'Need have we thereof, for none scarce have I had this long while past.' She leadeth him into a great ancient hall that was right poorly garnished. 'Sir,' saith she, 'Here will you harbour you the night, and you would take in good part that we may do and you knew the plight of this castle.' She maketh him be unarmed of a servant that was there within, and the damsels come before him and serve him right sweetly. The lady bringeth him a mantle to do on.

'Sir,' saith she, 'Within are no better garments wherewith to show you honour than this.' Perceval looketh on the damsels and hath great pity of them, for so well shapen were they of limb and body as that nature might not have better fashioned them, and all the beauty that may be in woman's body was in them, and all the sweetness and simpleness. The lady thereof

IX

'Lady,' saith Perceval, 'Is this castle, then, not yours?' 'Sir,' saith she, 'So much is all that remaineth to me of all my land, and you see there my daughters of whom is it right sore pity, for nought have they but what you see, albeit gentlewomen are they and of high lineage, but their kinsfolk are too far away, and a knight that is right cruel hath reft us of our land sithence that my lord was dead, and holdeth a son of mine in his prison, whereof I am right sorrowful, for he is one of the comeliest knights in the world. He had not been knight more than four years when he took him, and now may I aid neither myself nor other, but I have heard tell that there is a knight in the land of Wales that was the son of Alain li Gros of the Valleys of Camelot, and he is the Best Knight in the World, and this Alain was brother of Calobrutus, whose wife was I, and of whom I had my son and these two daughters. This know I well, that and the Good Knight that is so near akin to them were by any adventure to come into this island, I should have my son again, and my daughters that are disherited

Perceval's kindred

would have their lands again freely, and so should I be brought out of sore pain and poverty. I am of another lineage that is full far away, for King Ban of Benoic that is dead was mine uncle, but he hath a son that is a right good knight as I have been told, so that and one of these two should come nigh me in any of these islands right joyous should I be thereof.'

X

Perceval heareth that the two damsels are his uncle's daughters, and hath great pity thereof. 'Lady,' saith he, 'How is he named that is in prison?' 'Sir,' saith she, 'Galobruns, and he that holdeth him in prison is named Gohaz of the Castle of the Whale.' 'Is his castle near this, Lady?' saith he. 'Sir, there is but an arm of the sea to cross, and in all these islands of the sea is there none that hath any puissance but he only, and so assured is he that no dread hath he of any. For none that is in this land durst offend against him. Sir, one thing hath he bid me do, whereof I am sore grieved, that and I send him not one of my daughters, he hath sworn his oath that he will reave me of my castle.' 'Lady,' saith Perceval, 'An oath is not always kept. To the two damsels, please God, shall he do no shame, and right heavy am I of that he hath done already, for they were daughters of mine uncle. Alain li Gros was my father and Galobrutus my uncle, and many another good man that now is dead.'

XI

He findeth his cousin

When the damsels heard this, they kneeled down before him, and began to weep for joy and kiss his hands, and pray him for God's sake have mercy on them and on their brother. And he saith that he will not depart from their land until he hath done all he may. He remaineth the night in the castle and his mariner likewise. The lady made great joy of Perceval, and did him all the honour she might. When the morrow came they showed him the land of the King that had reft them of their land, but the lady could not tell him where her son was in prison. He departeth and cometh back to his ship when he hath taken leave of the lady and the damsels, and right glad was he to know that the damsels were so nigh to him of kin. So he prayeth God grant him that he may be able to give them back their land and bring them out of the poverty wherein they are. He roweth until that he is come under a rock, wherein was a cave at top round and narrow and secure like as it were a little house. Perceval looketh on that side, and seeth a man sitting within. He maketh the ship draw nigh the rock, then looketh and seeth the cutting of a way that went upwards through the rock. He is come forth of the ship and goeth up the little path until he cometh into the little house. He findeth within one of the comeliest knights in the world. He had a ring at his feet and a collar on his neck with a chain whereof the other end was fixed by a staple into a great

Galobruns in prison

ledge of the rock. He rose up over against Perceval as soon as he saw him. 'Sir Knight,' saith Perceval, 'You are well made fast.' 'Sir, that irketh me,' saith the knight; 'Better should I like myself elsewhere than here.' 'You would be right,' saith Perceval, 'For you are in right evil plight in the midst of this sea. Have you aught within to eat or to drink?' 'Sir,' saith he, 'The daughter of the Sick Knight that dwelleth in the island hard by, sendeth me every day in a boat as much meat as I may eat, for she hath great pity of me. The King that hath imprisoned me here hath reft her castles like as he hath those of my lady my mother.' 'May none remove you hence?' 'Sir, in no wise, save he that set me here, for he keepeth with him the key of the lock, and he told me when he departed hence that never more should I issue forth.' 'By my head,' saith Perceval, 'but you shall! And you were the son of Galobrutus, you were the son of mine uncle,' saith Perceval, 'and I of yours, so that it would be a reproach to me for evermore and I left you in this prison.'

XII

When Galobruns heareth that he is his uncle's son, great joy hath he thereof. He would have fallen at his feet, but Perceval would not, and said to him, 'Now be well assured, for I will seek your deliverance.' He cometh down from the rock, and so entereth the ship and roweth of a long space. He looketh before him and seeth a right rich island

and a right plenteous, and on the other side he seeth in a little islet a knight that is mounted up in a tall tree that was right broad with many boughs. There was a damsel with him, that had climbed up also for dread of a serpent, great and evil-favoured, that had issued from a hole in a mountain. The damsel seeth Perceval's ship coming, and crieth out to him. 'Ha, Sir,' saith she, 'Come to help this King that is up above, and me that am a damsel!' 'Whereof are you afeard, damsel?' saith Perceval. 'Of a great serpent, Sir,' saith she, 'that hath made us climb up, whereof ought I not to be sorry, for this King hath carried me off from my father's house, and would have done me shame of my body and this serpent had not run upon him.' 'And what is the King's name, damsel?' saith Perceval. 'Sir, he is called Gohaz of the Castle of the Whale. This great land is his own that is so plenteous, and other lands enow that he hath reft of my father and of other.' The King had great shame of this that the damsel told him, and made answer never a word. Perceval understandeth that it was he that held his cousin in prison, and is issued from the ship forthwith, sword drawn. The serpent seeth him, and cometh toward him, jaws yawning, and casteth forth fire and flame in great plenty. Perceval thrusteth his sword right through the gullet. 'Now may you come down,' saith he to the King. 'Sir,' saith he, 'The key of a chain wherewith a certain knight is bound hath fallen, and the serpent seized it.' Perceval

Gohaz in a tree

Perceval taketh Gohaz

rendeth open the throat and findeth the key forthwith, all red-hot with the fire of the serpent. The King cometh down, that hath no dread of aught, but cometh, rather, as he ought, to thank Perceval of the goodness he had done him, and Perceval seizeth him between his arms and beareth him away to the ship.

XIII

'Sir Knight,' saith Gohaz, 'Take heed what you do, for I am King of this land.' 'Therefore,' saith Perceval, 'I do it. For, had it been another I should do it not.' 'Ha, Sir,' saith the damsel, 'Leave me not here to get forth as I may, but help me until that I shall be in the house of my father, the Sick Knight, that is sore grieved on my account.' Perceval understandeth that it is the damsel of whom Galobruns spake such praise. He goeth to bring her down from the tree, then bringeth her into the ship, and so goeth back toward the rock where his cousin was. 'Sir Knight,' saith Gohaz, 'Where will you put me?' 'I will put you,' saith he, 'as an enemy, there, where you have put the son of mine uncle in prison; so shall I avenge me of you, and he also at his will.' When the King heard this, he was glad thereof not a whit, and the damsel was loath not a whit, whom he had thus disherited. They row until they come to the rock. Perceval issueth forth of the ship, and bringeth Gohaz up maugre his head. Galobruns seeth him coming and maketh great joy thereof, and Perceval saith to him: 'Behold here your

mortal enemy! Now do your will of him!' He taketh the key and so looseth him of the irons wherein he was imprisoned. Galobruns chaineth Gohaz

XIV

'Galobruns,' saith Perceval, 'Now may you do your pleasure of your enemy?' 'Sir,' saith he, 'Right gladly!' He maketh fast the irons on his feet that he had upon his own, and afterward setteth the collar on his neck. 'Now let him be here,' saith he, 'in such sort and in such prison as he put me; for well I know that he will be succoured of none.' After that, he flingeth the key into the sea as far as he might, and so seemed it to Galobruns that he well avenged himself in such wise, and better than if he had killed him. Perceval alloweth him everything therein at his will. They enter into the ship and leave Gohaz all sorrowing on the rock, that never thereafter ate nor drank. And Perceval bringeth his cousin and the damsel, and they row until that they come into their land, and Perceval maketh send for all the folk of King Gohaz and maketh all the more powerful do sure homage to Galobruns and his sisters in such sort that the land was all at their will. He sojourned there so long as it pleased him, and then departed and took leave of the damsel and Galobruns, that thanked him much for the lands that he had again through him.

XV

Perceval hath rowed until that he is come nigh a castle that was burning fiercely with a great flame, and seeth a hermitage upon the sea

King Hermit's castle

hard by. He seeth the hermit at the door of the chapel, and asketh him what the castle is that hath caught fire thus. 'Sir,' saith the hermit, 'I will tell you. Joseus, the son of King Pelles, slew his mother there. Never sithence hath the castle stinted of burning, and I tell you that of this castle and one other will be kindled the fire that shall burn up the world and put it to an end.' Perceval marvelleth much, and knew well that it was the castle of King Hermit his uncle. He departeth thence in great haste, and passeth three kingdoms and saileth by the wastes and deserts on one side and the other of the sea, for the ship ran somewhat a-nigh the land. He looketh and seeth on an island twelve hermits sitting on the sea-shore. The sea was calm and untroubled, and he made cast the anchor so as to keep the ship steady. Then he saluteth the hermits, and they all bow down to him in answer. He asketh them where have they their repair, and they tell him that they have not far away twelve chapels and twelve houses that surround a grave-yard wherein lie twelve dead knights that we keep watch over. They were all brothers-german, and right worshipful men, and none thereof lived more than twelve years knight save one only, and none of them was there but won much land and broad kingdoms from the misbelievers, and they all died in arms; and the name of the eldest was Alain li Gros, and he came into this country from the Valleys of Camelot to avenge his brother Alibans of the Waste City that the Giant King had slain, and he took vengeance on

him thereof, but he died thereafter of a wound that the Giant had given him. 'Sir,' saith one of the hermits, 'I was at his death, but nought was there he so longed after as a son of his, and he said that his name was Perceval. He was the last of the brothers that died.'

The welve ombs

XVI

When Perceval heard this he had pity thereof, and issued forth of the ship and came to land, and his mariner with him. He prayed the hermits that they would lead him to the grave-yard where the knights lay, and gladly did they so. Perceval is come thither and seeth the coffins right rich and fair, and the chapels full fairly dight, and every coffin lay over against the altar in each chapel. 'Lords, which coffin is that of the Lord of Camelot?' 'This, the highest,' say the hermits, 'and the most rich, for that he was eldest of all the brethren.' Perceval kneeleth down before it, then embraceth the coffin and prayeth right sweetly for the soul of his father, and in like manner he went to all the other coffins. He harboured the night with the hermits, and told them that Alain li Gros was his father and all the other his uncles. Right joyous were the hermits for that he was come thither, and the morrow, or ever he departed, he heard mass in the chapel of his father and in the others where he might. He entered into the ship and sped full swift, and so far hath the ship run that he draweth nigh the islands of Great Britain. He arriveth at the head of a forest under the Red Tower

The Sick Knight

whereof he had slain the lord, there where Meliot delivered Messire Gawain. He is issued forth of the ship and leadeth forth his horse and is armed, and commendeth the pilot to God. He mounteth on his destrier, all armed, and goeth amidst the land that was well-nigh void of people, for he himself had slain the greater part thereof, albeit he knew it not. He rideth so long, right amidst the country, that he cometh toward evensong to a hold that was in a great forest, and he bethought him that he would go into the hermitage, and he cometh straight into the hold, and seeth a knight lying in the entrance of the gate on a straw mattress, and a damsel sate at the bed's head, of passing great beauty, and held his head on her lap.

XVII

The knight reviled her from time to time, and said that he would make cut off her head and he had not that he desired to have, for that he was sick. Perceval looked at the lady that held him and served him full sweetly, and deemed her to be a good lady and a loyal. The Sick Knight called to Perceval. 'Sir,' saith he, 'Are you come in hither to harbour?' 'Sir,' saith Perceval, 'So please you, I will harbour here.' 'Then blame me not,' saith the knight, 'of that you shall see me do to my wife.' 'Sir,' saith Perceval, 'Sith that she is yours, you have a right to do your pleasure, but in all things ought one to be heedful on one's way.' The knight made him be carried back

into the dwelling, for that he had been in the air as long as pleased him, and commandeth his wife that she do much honour to the knight that is come to lodge within. 'But take heed,' saith he, 'that you be not seen at the table, but eat, as you are wont, at the squire's table, for, until such time as I have the golden cup I desire, I will not forgo my despite against you.' and his wife

XVIII

Perceval unarmed him. The lady had brought him a surcoat of scarlet for him to do on, and he asked her wherefore her lord reviled her and rebuked her in such sort, and she told him all the story how Lancelot had married her to him, and how her lord ever sithence had dishonoured her. 'Sir,' saith she, 'Now hath he fallen into misease, sithence then, and he hath a brother as sick as he is, and therefore hath Gohaz of the Castle of the Whale reft him of his land, whereof is he right sorry, and my lord hath never been heal since that he heard thereof. And well you know that such folk wax wroth of a little, and are overjoyed when they have a little thing that pleaseth them, for they live always in desire of somewhat. My lord hath heard tell of a cup of gold that a damsel beareth, that is right rich and of greater worth than aught he hath seen this long time, and a knight goeth with the damsel that beareth the cup, and saith that none may have it save he be the Best Knight in the World. My lord hath told me many times, sithence he heard tidings thereof, that never shall the despite he

An assembly

hath toward me be forgone, until that he shall have the cup. But he is so angry withal with his brother that hath lost his land, that I aby it right dear, for I do all his will and yet may I have no fair treatment of him. Howbeit, for no ill that he may do, nor no churlishness that he may say, will I be against him in nought that he hath set his mind on. For I would have him, and I had him, blessed be Lancelot through whom it was so. As much as I loved him in health, so much love I him in his sickness, and more yet, for I desire to deserve that God shall bring him to a better mind.'

XIX

'Lady,' saith Perceval, 'Great praise ought you to have of this that you say; but you may well tell him of a truth that the sick King his brother hath all his land freely and his daughter, for I was at the reconquering thereof, and know the knight well that gave it back to him. But of the golden cup can I give you no witting.' 'Sir,' saith she, 'The damsel is to bear it to an assembly of knights that is to be held hard by this, under the White Tower. There hath she to give it to the best knight, and him that shall do best at the assembly, and the knight that followeth the damsel is bound to carry it whither he that shall win it may command, and if he would fain it should be given to another rather than to himself.' 'Lady,' saith Perceval, 'Well meseemeth that he who shall win the cup by prize of arms will be right courteous and he send it to you, and God grant that he that

hath it may do you such bounty as you desire.' 'Sir,' saith she, 'Methinketh well, so Lancelot were there, either he or Messire Gawain, that, and they won it, so they remembered them of me, and knew how needful it were to me, they would promise me the cup.' 'Lady,' saith Perceval, 'By one of these twain ought you well to have it, for greater prize now long since have they won.' She goeth to her lord and saith to him: 'Sir,' saith she, 'Now may you be more joyous than is your wont, for that your brother hath his land again all quit. For the knight that is within was at the reconquering.' The Sick Knight heard her and had great joy thereof. 'Go!' saith he to his wife, 'and do great honour to the knight, but take heed you sit not otherwise than you are wont.' 'Sir,' saith she, 'I will not.'

at the White Tower

XX

The damsel maketh Perceval sit at meat. When he had washen, he thought that the lady should have come to sit beside him, but she would not disobey her lord's commandment. When Perceval was set at the table and he had been served of the first meats, thereupon the lady went to sit with the squires. Perceval was much shamed that she should sit below, but he was not minded to speak, for she had told him somewhat of her lord's manner. Howbeit, he lay the night in the hold, and, on the morrow when he had taken leave, he departed, and bethought him in his courage that the knight would do good chivalry and great alms that should do this

The Damsel of the Car

sick knight his desire as concerning the cup, in such sort as that his wife should be freed of the annoy that she is in, for that all knights that knew thereof ought to have pity of her. Perceval goeth his way as he that hath great desire to accomplish that he hath to do, and to see the token of his going again to the castle where the chain of gold appeared to him, for never yet saw he dwelling that pleased him so much. He hath ridden so far that he is come into the joyless forest of the Black Hermit, that is so loathly and horrible that no leaves nor greenery are there by winter nor by summer, nor was song of bird never heard therein, but all the land is gruesome and burnt, and wide are the cracks therein. He hath scarce gone thereinto or ever he hath overtaken the Damsel of the Car, that made full great joy of him. 'Sir,' saith she, 'Bald was I the first time I saw you; now may you see that I have my hair.' 'Certes, yea!' saith Perceval, 'And, as methinketh, hair passing beautiful.' 'Sir,' saith she, 'I was wont to carry my arm at my neck in a scarf of gold and silk, for that I thought the service I did you in the hostel of King Fisherman your uncle had been ill bestowed; but now well I see that it was not; wherefore now carry I the one arm in the same manner as the other; and the damsel that wont to go a-foot now goeth a-horseback; and blessed be you that have so approved you in goodness by the good manner of your heart, and by your likeness to the first of your lineage, whom you resemble in all good conditions. Sir,' saith she, 'I durst not come nigh the

castle, for there be archers there that shoot so sore that none may endure their strokes, and hereof will they stint not, they say, until such time as you be come thither. But well know I wherefore they will cease then, for they will come to shut you up within to slay and to destroy. Natheless all they that are within will have no power, nor will they do you evil, save only the lord of the castle; but he will do battle against you right gladly.' **Black Hermit's Castle**

XXI

Perceval goeth toward the castle of the Black Hermit, and the Damsel of the Car after. The archers draw and shoot stoutly. Perceval goeth forward a great gallop, but they know him not on account of the white shield. They think rather that it is one of the other knights, and they lodge many arrows in his shield. He came nigh a drawbridge over a moat right broad and foul and horrible, and the bridge was lowered so soon as he came, and all the archers left of shooting. Then knew they well that it was Perceval who came. The door was opened to receive him, for they of the gate and they of the castle within thought to have power to slay him. But so soon as they saw him, they lost their will thereof and were all amated and without strength, and said that they would set this business on their lord that was strong enough and puissant enough to slay one man. Perceval entered all armed into a great hall, and found it filled all around with a great throng of folk that

Black Hermit's foul death

was right foul to look on. He that was called the Black Hermit was full tall and seemed to be of noble lordship, and he was in the midst of the hall, all armed. 'Sir,' say his men, 'And you have not defence of yourself, never no counsel nor aid may you have of us!

XXII

'We are yours to guard, to protect, and oftentimes have we defended you; now defend us in this sore need.' The Black Hermit sate upon a tall black horse, and was right richly armed. So soon as Perceval espieth him, he cometh with such a rush against him that he maketh all the hall resound, and the Black Hermit cometh in like sort. They mell together with such force that the Black Hermit breaketh his spear upon Perceval, but Perceval smiteth him so passing stoutly on the left side upon the shield, that he beareth him to the ground beside his horse, so that in the fall he made he to-frushed two of the great ribs in the overturn. And when they that were therein saw him fall, they opened the trap-door of a great pit that was in the midst of the hall. So soon as they had opened it, the foulest stench that any smelt ever issued thereout. They take their lord and cast him into this abysm and this filth. After that, they come to Perceval, and so yield the castle and put them at his mercy in everything. Thereupon, behold you, the Damsel of the Car that cometh. They deliver up to her the heads sealed in gold, both

the head of the King and of the Queen, and she departeth forthwith, for well knoweth she that Perceval will achieve that he hath to do without her. She departeth from the castle and goeth the speediest she may toward the Valleys of Camelot. And all they of the castle that had been the Black Hermit's are obedient to Perceval to do his will, and they have him in covenant that never more shall knights be harassed there in such sort as they had been theretofore, but rather that they should receive gladly any knights that should pass that way, like as in other places. Perceval departed from the castle rejoicing for that he had drawn them to the believe of Our Lord, and every day was His service done therein in holy wise, like as it is done in other places. The golden cup

XXIII

Hereof ought the good knight to be loved that by the goodness of his heart and the loyalty of his knighthood hath achieved all the emprises he undertook, without reproach and without blame. Perceval hath ridden until he hath overtaken the damsel that carried the rich cup of gold and the knight that was along with her. Perceval saluteth him, and the knight maketh answer, may he be blessed of God and of His sweet Mother. 'Fair Sir,' saith Perceval, 'Is this damsel of your company?' Saith the knight, 'Rather am I of hers. But we are going to an assembly of knights that is to be under the White Tower to the intent to

Perceval winneth

prove which knight is most worth, and to him that shall have the prize of the assembly shall be delivered this golden cup.' 'By my head,' saith Perceval, 'That will be fair to see!' He departeth from the knight and the damsel, and goeth his way a great pace amidst the meadows under the White Tower, whither the knights were coming from all parts, and many of them were already armed to issue forth. So soon as it was known that the damsel with the cup was come thither, the fellowships assembled on all sides, and great was the clashing of arms. Perceval hurleth into the assembly in such sort that many a knight he smiteth down and overthroweth at his coming, and he giveth so many blows and so many receiveth that all they that behold marvel much how he may abide. The assembly lasted until evensong, and when it came to an end the damsel came to the knights and prayed and required that they would declare to her by right judgment of arms which had done the best. The more part said that he of the white shield had surpassed them all in arms, and all agreed thereto. The damsel was right glad, for well she knew that they spake truth. She cometh to Perceval; 'Sir,' saith she, 'I present you this cup of gold for your good chivalry, and therefore is it meet and right you should know whence the cup cometh. The elder Damsel of the Tent where the evil custom was wont to be, sent it to Messire Gawain, and Messire Gawain made much joy thereof. And it came to pass on such wise that Brundans, the

son of the sister of Briant of the Isles, slew Meliot of Logres, the most courteous knight and the most valiant that was in the realm of Logres, and thereof was Messire Gawain so sorrowful that he knew not how to contain himself. For Meliot had twice rescued him from death, and King Arthur once. He was liegeman of Messire Gawain. Wherefore he prayeth and beseecheth you on his behalf that you receive not the cup save you undertake to avenge him. For he was loved of all the court, albeit he had haunted it but little. Brundans slew him in treason when Meliot was unawares of him.' 'Damsel,' saith Perceval, 'Were there no cup at all, yet natheless should I be fain to do the will of Messire Gawain, for never might I love the man that had deserved his hatred.' He taketh the cup in his hand. 'Damsel,' saith he, 'I thank you much hereof, and God grant I may reward you for the same.' 'Sir,' saith she, 'Brundans is a right proud knight, and beareth a shield party of vert and argent. He is minded never to change his cognisance, for that his father bore the same.' Perceval called the knight that was of the damsel's company. 'I beseech you,' saith he, 'of guerdon and of service, that you bear this cup for me to the hold of the Sick Knight, and tell his wife that the Knight of the White Shield that was harboured there within hath sent it her by you.' 'Sir,' saith the knight, 'This will I do gladly to fulfil your will.' He taketh the cup to furnish out the conditions of the message, and so departeth forthwith.

the golden cup

Of Castle Perilous

XXIV

Perceval lay the night in the castle of the White Tower, and departed thence on the morrow as he that would fain do somewhat whereof he might deserve well of Messire Gawain. Many a time had he heard tell of Meliot of Logres and of his chivalry and of his great valour. He was entered into a forest, and had heard mass of a hermit, from whom he had departed. He came to the Castle Perilous that was hard by there where Meliot lay sick, lay wounded, when Lancelot brought him the sword and the cloth wherewith he touched his wounds. He entered into the castle and alighted. The damsel of the castle, that made great dole, came to meet Perceval. 'Damsel,' saith he, 'Wherefore are you so sorrowful?' 'Sir,' saith she, 'For a knight that I tended and healed herewithin, whom Brundans hath killed in treason, and God thereof grant us vengeance yet, for so courteous knight saw I never.' While she was speaking in this manner, forthwith behold you a damsel that cometh. 'Ha, Sir!' saith she to Perceval, 'Mount you again and come to aid us, for none other knight find I in this land nor in this forest but only you all alone!' 'What need have you of my aid?' saith Perceval. 'A knight is carrying off my lady by force, that was going to the court of King Arthur.' 'Who is your lady?' saith Perceval. 'Sir, she is the younger Damsel of the Tent where Messire Gawain overthrew the evil customs. For God's sake,

hasten you, for he revileth her sore for her love of the King and of Messire Gawain.' Perceval remounteth forthwith and issueth forth of the castle on the spur. The damsel bringeth him on as fast as the knight can go. They had not ridden far before they came a-nigh, and Perceval heard the damsel crying aloud for mercy, and the knight said that mercy upon her he would not have, and so smote her on the head and neck with the flat of his sword. **Brundans boasteth**

XXV

Perceval espied the knight and saw that the cognisance of his shield was such as that which had been set forth to him. 'Sir,' saith he, 'Too churlishly are you entreating this damsel! What wrong hath she done you?' 'What is it to you of me and of her?' 'I say it,' saith Perceval, 'for that no knight ought to do churlishly to damsel.' 'He will not stint for you yet!' saith Brundans. He raiseth his sword and dealeth the damsel a buffet with the flat so passing heavy that it maketh her stoop withal so that the blood rayeth out at mouth and nose. 'By my head,' saith Perceval, 'On this buffet I defy thee, for the death of Meliot and for the shame you have done this damsel.' 'Neither you nor none other may brag that you have heart to attack me, but you shall aby it right dear!' 'That shall you see presently,' saith Perceval, and so draweth back the better to let drive at him, and moveth towards him as fast as his horse may run, and smiteth him so passing sore that he pierceth his shield and

Perceval slayeth Brundans bursteth his habergeon and then thrusteth his spear into his body with such force that he overthroweth him all in a heap, him and his horse, in such sort that he breaketh both legs in the fall. Then he alighteth over him, lowereth his coif, unlaceth the ventail, and smiteth off his head. 'Damsel,' saith he, 'Take it, I present it to you. And, sith that you are going to King Arthur's court, I pray and beseech you that you carry it thither and so salute him first for me, and tell Messire Gawain and Lancelot that this is the last present I look ever to make them, for I think never to see them more. Howbeit, wheresoever I may be, I shall be their well-wisher, nor may I never withdraw me of my love, and I would fain I might make them the same present of the heads of all their enemies, but that I may do nought against God's will.' The damsel giveth him thanks for that he hath delivered her from the hands of the knight, and saith that she shall praise him much thereof to the King and Messire Gawain. She goeth her way and carrieth off the head, and Perceval biddeth her to God. He returned back to Castle Perilous, and the damsel made great joy thereof when she understood that he had slain Brundans. Perceval lay there that night, and departed on the morrow after that he had heard mass. When he came forth of the castle he met the knight by whom he had sent the cup to the Sick Knight's wife. Perceval asketh how it is with him. 'Sir,' saith he, 'I have carried out your message

right well, for never was a thing received with such good will. The Sick Knight hath forgone his grudge against his wife. She eateth at his table, and the household do her commandment.' 'This liketh me right well,' saith Perceval, 'and I thank you of doing this errand.' 'Sir,' saith the knight, 'No thing is there I would not do for you, for that you made my brother Knight Hardy there where you first saw him Knight Coward.' 'Sir,' saith Perceval, 'Good knight was your brother and a right good end he made, but a little it forthinketh me that he might have still been living had he abided in his cowardize.' 'Sir,' saith he, 'Better is he dead, sith that he died with honour, than that he should live with shame. Yet glad was I not of his death, for a hardy knight he was, and yet more would have been, had he lived longer.'

Perceval at Camelot

XXVI

Perceval departeth from the knight and commendeth him to God. He hath wandered so far one day and another that he is returned to his own most holy castle, and findeth therein his mother and his sister that the Damsel of the Car had brought thither. The Widow Lady had made bear thither the body that lay in the coffin before the castle of Camelot in the rich chapel that she had builded there. His sister brought the cere-cloth that she took in the Waste Chapel, and presented there where the Graal was. Perceval made bring the coffin of the other knight that was at the entrance of

The Graal departeth

his castle, within the chapel likewise, and place it beside the coffin of his uncle, nor never thereafter might it be removed. Josephus telleth us that Perceval was in this castle long time, nor never once moved therefrom in quest of no adventure; rather was his courage so attorned to the Saviour of the World and His sweet Mother, that he and his sister and the damsel that was therein led a holy life and a religious. Therein abode they even as it pleased God, until that his mother passed away and his sister and all they that were therein save he alone. The hermits that were nigh the castle buried them and sang their masses, and came every day and took counsel of him for the holiness they saw him do and the good life that he led there. So one day whilst he was in the holy chapel where the hallows were, forthwith, behold you, a Voice that cometh down therein: 'Perceval,' saith the Voice, 'Not long shall you abide herein; wherefore is it God's will that you dispart the hallows amongst the hermits of the forest, there where these bodies shall be served and worshipped, and the most Holy Graal shall appear herein no more, but within a brief space shall you know well the place where it shall be.' When the Voice departed, all the coffins that were therein crashed so passing loud that it seemed the master-hall had fallen. He crosseth and blesseth him and commendeth him to God. On a day the hermits came to him. He disparted the holy relics among them, and they builded above them holy churches and houses

of religion that are seen in the lands and in the islands. Joseus, the son of King Hermit, remained therein with Perceval, for he well knew that he would be departing thence betimes. Perceval saileth forth

XXVII

Perceval heard one day a bell sound loud and high without the manor toward the sea. He came to the windows of the hall and saw the ship come with the white sail and the Red Cross thereon, and within were the fairest folk that ever he might behold, and they were all robed in such manner as though they should sing mass. When the ship was anchored under the hall they went to pray in the most holy chapel. They brought the richest vessels of gold and silver that any might ever see, like as it were coffins, and set therein one of the three bodies of knights that had been brought into the chapel, and the body of King Fisherman, and of the mother of Perceval. But no savour in the world smelleth so sweet. Perceval took leave of Joseus and commended him to the Saviour of the World, and took leave of the household, from whom he departed in like manner. The worshipful men that were in the ship signed them of the cross and blessed them likewise. The ship wherein Perceval was drew far away, and a Voice that issued from the manor as she departed commended them to God and to His sweet Mother. Josephus recordeth us that Perceval departed in such wise, nor never thereafter did no earthly man know what

Perceval's holy chapel

became of him, nor doth the history speak of him more. But the history telleth us that Joseus abode in the castle that had been King Fisherman's, and shut himself up therein so that none might enter, and lived upon that the Lord God might send him. He dwelt there long time after that Perceval had departed, and ended therein. After his end, the dwelling began to fall. Natheless never was the chapel wasted nor decayed, but was as whole thereafter as tofore and is so still. The place was far from folk, and the place seemed withal to be somewhat different. When it was fallen into decay, many folk of the lands and islands that were nighest thereunto marvel them what may be in this manor. They dare a many that they should go see what was therein, and sundry folk went thither from all the lands, but none durst never enter there again save two Welsh knights that had heard tell of it. Full comely knights they were, young and joyous-hearted. So either pledged him to other that they would go thither by way of gay adventure; but therein remained they of a long space after, and when again they came forth they led the life of hermits, and clad them in hair shirts, and went by the forest and so ate nought save roots only, and led a right hard life; yet ever they made as though they were glad, and if that any should ask whereof they rejoiced in such-wise, 'Go,' said they to them that asked, 'thither where we have been, and you shall know the wherefore.' In such sort made they answer to the folk. These two knights died in this holy life, nor were none

other tidings never brought thence by them. They of that land called them saints.

The Book of the Graal

XXVIII

Here endeth the story of the most Holy Graal. Josephus, by whom it is placed on record, giveth the benison of Our Lord to all that hear and honour it. The Latin from whence this history was drawn into Romance was taken in the Isle of Avalon, in a holy house of religion that standeth at the head of the Moors Adventurous, there where King Arthur and Queen Guenievre lie, according to the witness of the good men religious that are therein, that have the whole history thereof, true from the beginning even to the end. After this same history beginneth the story how Briant of the Isles renounced King Arthur on account of Lancelot whom he loved not, and how he assured King Claudas that reft King Ban of Benoic of his land. This story telleth how he conquered him and by what means, and how Galobrus of the Red Launde came to King Arthur's court to help Lancelot, for that he was of his lineage. This story is right long and right adventurous and weighty, but the book will now forthwith be silent thereof until another time.

The Author's Conclusion

For the Lord of Neele made the Lord of Cambrein this book be written, that never tofore was treated in Romance but one single time

The worth of this book

besides this; and the book that was made tofore this is so ancient that only with great pains may one make out the letter. And let Messire Johan de Neele well understand that he ought to hold this story dear, nor ought he tell nought thereof to ill-understanding folk, for a good thing that is squandered upon bad folk is never remembered by them for good.

Explicit

the Romance of Perceval the nephew of King Fisherman.

NOTE

This ancient 'Book of the Holy Graal,' *a valuable addition to our English Arthurian literature, has been translated from the Old French by* Dr. Sebastian Evans. *In his* '*Epilogue*' *the Translator summarises the literary history of the book, and indicates his strikingly original and noteworthy theory as to the origin of the work. Whether his views be ultimately accepted or rejected by Arthurian scholars,* Dr. Evans's *noble rendering of the old-world romance will long be treasured by students for its intrinsic merits. Publisher and Editor desire to thank him for generously placing his version at their disposal for inclusion in the present Series. They desire also to thank* Sir Edward Burne-Jones *for enriching the volumes with the embellishments of frontispieces and title-pages.*

I. G.

Feb. 14*th*, 1898.

THE
TRANSLATOR'S EPILOGUE

THIS Book is translated from the first volume of *Perceval le Gallois ou le conte du Graal*; edited by M. Ch. Potvin for 'La Société des Bibliophiles Belges' in 1866,[1] from the MS. numbered 11,145 in the library of the Dukes of Burgundy at Brussels. This MS. I find thus described in M. F. J. Marchal's catalogue of that priceless collection: '*Le Roman de Saint Graal*, beginning *Ores lestoires*, in the French language; date, first third of the sixteenth century; with ornamental capitals.'[2] Written three centuries later than the original romance, and full as it is of faults of the scribe, this manuscript is by far the most complete known copy of the Book of the Graal in existence, being defective only in Branch XXI. Titles 8 and 9, the substance of which is fortunately preserved elsewhere. Large fragments, however, amounting in all to nearly one-seventh of

The MSS

[1] 6 vols. 8vo. Mons, 1866-1871.

[2] Marchal *Cat.*, 2 vols. Brussels, 1842. Vol. i. p. 223.

M. Potvin's edition

the whole, of a copy in handwriting of the thirteenth century, are preserved in six consecutive leaves and one detached leaf bound up with a number of other works in a MS. numbered 113 in the City Library at Berne. The volume is in folio on vellum closely written in three columns to the page, and the seven leaves follow the last poem contained in it, entitled *Duremart le Gallois*. The manuscript is well known, having been lent to M. de Sainte Palaye for use in the Monuments of French History issued by the Benedictines of the Congregation of St. Maur. Selections from the poems it contains are given in Sinner's *Extraits de Poésie du XIII. Siècle*,[1] and it is described, unfortunately without any reference to these particular leaves, by the same learned librarian in the *Catalogus Codicum* MSS. *Bibl. Bernensis*. J. R. Sinner.[2]

M. Potvin has carefully collated for his edition all that is preserved of the Romance in this manuscript, comprising all the beginning of the work as far as Branch III. Title 8, about the middle, and from Branch XVIII. Title 23, near the beginning, to Branch XIX. Title 5, in the middle. Making allowance for variations

[1] Lausanne, 1759.

[2] 3 vols. 8vo. Berne, 1770, etc. Vol. ii., Introduc. viii and p. 389 *et seq.*

of spelling and sundry minor differences of reading, by no means always in favour of the earlier scribe, the Berne fragments are identical with the corresponding portions of the Brussels manuscript, and it is therefore safe to assume that the latter is on the whole an accurate transcript of the entire original Romance.

Date of the Romance

The only note of time in the book itself is contained in the declaration at the end. From this it appears that it was written by order of the Seingnor of Cambrein for Messire Jehan the Seingnor of Neele. M. Potvin, without giving any reason for so doing, assumes that this Lord of Cambrein is none other than the Bishop of Cambrai. If this assumption be correct, the person referred to was probably either John of Béthune, who held the see from 1200 till July 27, 1219, or his successor Godfrey of Fontaines (Condé), who held it till 1237. To me, however, it seems more likely that the personage intended was in reality the 'Seingnor' of Cambrin, the chef-lieu of a canton of the same name, on a small hill overlooking the peat-marshes of Béthune, albeit I can find no other record of any such landed proprietor's existence.

Be this as it may, the Messire Jehan, Seingnor of Neele, can hardly be other than the John de Nesle who was present at the

The Welsh translation

battle of Bouvines in 1214, and who in 1225 sold the lordship of Bruges to Joan of Flanders.[1] These dates therefore may be regarded as defining that of the original Romance within fairly narrow limits.

This conclusion is confirmed by other evidence. An early Welsh translation of the story was published with an English version and a glossary by the Rev. Robert Williams in the first volume of his *Selections from the Hengwrt* MSS.[2] The first volume of this work is entitled *Y Seint Greal, being the adventures of King Arthur's knights of the Round Table, in the quest of the Holy Grail, and on other occasions. Originally written about the year* 1200. The volume, following the manuscript now in the library of W. W. E. Wynne, Esq., at Peniarth, is divided into two parts. The first, fol. 1-109 of the manuscript, represents the thirteenth to the seventeenth book of Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*. Of the second, which represents the Romance here translated, Mr. Williams writes: 'The second portion of the Welsh Greal, folios 110-280, contains the adventures of Gwalchmei Peredur and Lancelot, and of the knights of the Round Table:

[1] Rigord. *Chron.* 196, p. 288. Wm. le Breton, *Phil.* xi. 547. See also Birch-Hirschfeld, *Die Gralsage*, p. 143.

[2] 2 vols. 8vo. London, Richards, 1876-1892.

but these are not found in the *Morte D'Arthur*. The Peniarth MS. is beautifully written on vellum, and in perfect preservation, and its date is that of Henry VI., the early part of the fifteenth century. The orthography and style of writing agrees literally with that of the Mabinogion of the Llyvr Côch Hergest, which is of that date. This, of course, is a transcript of an earlier copy; but there is no certainty when it was first translated into Welsh, though Aneurin Owen in his Catalogue of the Hengwrt MSS. assigns it to the sixth year of Henry I. It is mentioned by Davydh ab Gwilym, who died in 1368.'

Defects of the Welsh

Whatever may be the date of the Welsh version, the translator had no great mastery of French, and is often at fault as to the meaning both of words and sentences, and when in a difficulty is only too apt to cut the knot by omitting the passage bodily. The book itself, moreover, is not entire. On page 275, all between Branch IX. Title 16 and Branch XI. Title 2, twenty-two chapters in all, is missing. Again, on page 355, Titles 10-16 in Branch XXI. are left out, while the whole of the last Branch, containing 28 Titles, is crumpled up into one little chapter, from which it would seem that the Welshman had read the French, but thought it waste of pains to translate it. In all,

The Welsh names

not to speak of other defects, there are fifty-six whole chapters in the present book, of which there is not a word in the Welsh.

In one matter, however, Mr. Williams's English translation has stood me in good stead. In Branch xxi., as I have said, the French manuscript makes default of two Titles, but almost the whole of their substance is supplied by the Welsh version. By an unlucky accident, before the hiatus in the French is fully filled up, the Welsh version itself becomes defective, though the gap thus left open can hardly extend beyond a very few words. Without this supplement, incomplete as it is, it would have been impossible to give the full drift of one of the Romancer's best stories, which is equally unintelligible in both the French and Welsh texts in their present state.

As the Welsh version gives a number of names both of persons and places widely differing from those in the French, it may be useful here to note the principal changes made. Perceval in the Welsh is called Peredur, which is said to mean *steel suit*. The Welshman, however, adds that the name in French is *Peneffresvo Galief*, which, unless it be a misreading or miswriting for Perceval le Galois, is to me wholly unintelligible. Perceval's father, Alain li Gros, is in the Welsh Earl

Evrawg, and his sister Dindrane, Danbrann. King Arthur is Emperor Arthur, his Queen Guenievre, Gwenhwyvar, and their son Lohot, Lohawt or Llacheu. Messire Gawain is Gwalchmei; Chaus, son of Ywain li Aoutres, Gawns, son of Owein Vrych; Messire Kay or Kex is Kei the Long; Ahuret the Bastard, Anores; Ygerne, wife of Uther Pendragon, Eigyr; Queen Jandree, Landyr; and King Fisherman for the most part King Peleur. Of places, Cardoil is Caerlleon on Usk, Pannenoisance, Penvoisins; Tintagel, Tindagoyl; and Avalon, Avallach. An ill-sorted union

By a double stroke of ill-luck, the complete and wholly independent Romance here translated has thus been printed by its two former editors as if it were only a part of some other story. M. Potvin describes it as the 'First Part, the Romance in Prose,' of his *Perceval le Gallois*, and Mr. Williams accepts it as the 'Second Portion' of his *Y Seint Greal*. This unhappy collocation has led not a few of M. Potvin's readers to neglect his First Part, under the impression that the story is retold in the other volumes containing the Romance in verse; while not a few of Mr. Williams's readers have neglected his Second Portion under the impression that there could be nothing of any special importance in an adjunct referred to by the

Fulke Fitz-Warine

Editor in so perfunctory a manner. In very truth, however, the Story of the Holy Graal here told is not only the most coherent and poetic of all the many versions of the Legend, but is also the first and most authentic.

This seems to be proved beyond doubt by a passage in the History of Fulke Fitz-Warine, originally written apparently between the years 1256 and 1264. The passage occurs at the end of the History, and is printed in verse of which I give a literal prose translation.

'Merlin saith that in Britain the Great a Wolf shall come from the White Launde. Twelve sharp teeth shall he have, six below and six above. He shall have so fierce a look that he shall chase the Leopard forth of the White Launde, so much force shall he have and great virtue. We now know that Merlin said this for Fulke the son of Waryn, for each of you ought to understand of a surety how in the time of the King Arthur that was called the White Launde which is now named the White Town. For in this country was the chapel of S. Austin that was fair, where Kahuz, the son of Ywein, dreamed that he carried off the candlestick and that he met a man who hurt him with a knife and wounded him in the side. And he, on sleep, cried out so loud that King Arthur hath heard him and awakened from sleep. And

when Kahuz was awake, he put his hand to his side. There hath he found the knife that had smitten him through. So TELLETH US THE GRAAL, THE BOOK OF THE HOLY VESSEL. There the King Arthur recovered his bounty and his valour when he had lost all his chivalry and his virtue. From this country issued forth the Wolf as saith Merlin the Wise, and the twelve sharp teeth have we known by his shield. He bore a shield indented as the heralds have devised. In the shield are twelve teeth of gules and argent. By the Leopard may be known and well-understood King John, for he bore in his shield the leopards of beaten gold.'[1] Story of Chaus

The story of Kahuz or Chaus here indicated by the historian is told at length in the opening chapters of the present work and, so far as is known, nowhere else. The inference is therefore unavoidable that we have here 'The Graal, the Book of the Holy Vessel' to which the biographer of Fulke refers. The use, more-

[1] *L'histoire de Foulkes Fitz-Warin.* Ed. F. Michel, Paris, 1840; p. 110. Ed. T. Wright (Warton Club), London, 1855; p. 179. Ed. J. Stevenson (*Rolls Pub. Chron.* of R. Coggeshall), London, 1875; p. 412. The MS. containing the history (*MS. Reg.* 12. c. XII.) was first privately printed for the late Sir T. Duffus Hardy from a transcript by A. Berbrugger.

The trouveur Sarrazin

over, of the definite article shows that the writer held this book to be conclusive authority on the subject. By the time he retold the story of Fulke, a whole library of Romances about Perceval and the Holy Graal had been written, with some of which it is hard to believe that any historian of the time was unacquainted. He nevertheless distinguishes this particular story as 'The Graal,' a way of speaking he would scarce have adopted had he known of any other 'Graals' of equal or nearly equal authority.

Several years later, about 1280, the trouveur Sarrazin also cites 'The Graal' (*li Graaus*) in the same manner, in superfluous verification of the then accepted truism that King Arthur was at one time Lord of Great Britain. This appeal to 'The Graal' as the authority for a general belief shows that it was at that time recognised as a well-spring of authentic knowledge; while the fact that the trouveur was not confounding 'The Graal' with the later version of the story is further shown by his going on presently to speak of 'the Romance that Chrestien telleth so fairly of Perceval—the adventures of the Graal.'[1]

[1] 'Le Roman de Ham,' in the Appendix to F. Michel's *Histoire des Ducs de Normandie*. Soc. de l'Hist. de France, 1840, pp. 225, 230.

Perhaps, however, the most striking testimony to the fact that this work is none other than the original Book of the Graal is to be found in the Chronicle of Helinand, well known at the time the Romance was written not only as a historian but as a troubadour at one time in high favour at the court of Philip Augustus, and in later years as one of the most ardent preachers of the Albigensian Crusade. The passage, a part of which has been often quoted, is inserted in the Chronicle under the year 720, and runs in English thus: Helinand's Chronicle

'At this time a certain marvellous vision was revealed by an angel to a certain hermit in Britain concerning S. Joseph, the decurion who deposed from the cross the Body of Our Lord, as well as concerning the paten or dish in the which Our Lord supped with His disciples, whereof the history was written out by the said hermit and is called "Of the Graal" (*de Gradali*). Now, a platter, broad and somewhat deep, is called in French *gradalis* or *gradale*, wherein costly meats with their sauce are wont to be set before rich folk by degrees (*gradatim*) one morsel after another in divers orders, and in the vulgar speech it is called *graalz*, for that it is grateful and acceptable to him that eateth therein, as well for that which containeth the victual, for that haply it is of silver or other

Date of Helinand

precious material, as for the contents thereof, to wit, the manifold courses of costly meats I have not been able to find this history written in Latin, but it is in the possession of certain noblemen written in French only, nor, as they say, can it easily be found complete. This, however, I have not hitherto been able to obtain from any person so as to read it with attention. As soon as I can do so, I will translate into Latin such passages as are more useful and more likely to be true.'[1]

A comparison of this passage with the Introduction to the present work[2] leaves no doubt that Helinand here refers to this Book of the Graal, which cannot therefore be of a later date than that at which he made this entry in his chronicle. At the same time, the difficulty he experienced in obtaining even the loan of the volume shows that the work had at that time been only lately written, as in the course of a few years, copies of a book so widely popular

[1] Helinandi Op. Ed. Migne. *Patrol.* Vol. ccxii. col. 814. The former part of the passage is quoted with due acknowledgment by Vincent of Beauvais. *Spec. Hist.* B. xxiii. c. 147. Vincent, however, spells the French word '*grail*,' and, by turning Helinand's *nec* into *nunc*, makes him say that the French work can *now* easily be found complete. Vincent finished his *Speculum Historiale* in 1244. B. xxi. c. 105.

[2] Vol. i. p. 1, etc.

must have been comparatively common. The date, therefore, at which Helinand's Chronicle was written determines approximately that of the Book of the Graal. Vincent of Beauvais

In its present state, the Chronicle comes to an end with a notice of the capture of Constantinople by the French in 1204, and it has been hastily assumed that Helinand's labours as a chronicler must have closed in that year. As a matter of fact they had not then even begun. At that time Helinand was still a courtly troubadour, and had not yet entered on the monastic career during which his Chronicle was compiled. He was certainly living as late as 1229, and preached a sermon, which assuredly shows no signs of mental decrepitude, in that year at a synod in Toulouse.[1]

Fortunately a passage in the *Speculum Historiale* of Vincent of Beauvais, himself a younger contemporary and probably a personal acquaintance of Helinand, throws considerable light on

[1] Sermon xxvi., printed in Migne, u. s. col. 692. It has been doubted whether this sermon, preached in the church of S. Jacques, was addressed to the Council held at Toulouse in 1219, or to the one held in 1229, but a perusal of the sermon itself decides the question. It is wholly irrelevant to the topics discussed at the former gathering, while it is one continued commentary on the business transacted at the latter. See also Dom Brial, *Hist. Litt. de la France*, xviii. 92.

Bishop Guarin

the real date of Helinand's Chronicle. After recounting certain matters connected with the early years of the thirteenth century, the last date mentioned being 1209, Vincent proceeds:—

'In those times, in the diocese of Beauvais, was Helinand monk of Froid-mont, a man religious and distinguished for his eloquence, who also composed those verses on Death in our vulgar tongue which are publicly read, so elegantly and so usefully that the subject is laid open clearer than the light. He also diligently digested into a certain huge volume a Chronicle from the beginning of the world down to his own time. But in truth this work was dissipated and dispersed in such sort that it is nowhere to be found entire. For it is reported that the said Helinand lent certain sheets of the said work to one of his familiars, to wit, Guarin, Lord Bishop of Senlis of good memory, and thus, whether through forgetfulness or negligence or some other cause, lost them altogether. From this work, however, as far as I have been able to find it, I have inserted many passages in this work of mine own also.'

It will thus be seen that about 1209, Helinand became a monk at Froid-mont, and it is exceedingly improbable that any portion of his Chronicle was written before that date. On the other hand, his 'familiar' Guarin only

became Bishop of Senlis in 1214, and died in 1227,[1] so that it is certain Helinand wrote the last part of his Chronicle not later than the last-mentioned year. The limits of time, therefore, between which the Chronicle was written are clearly circumscribed; and if it is impossible to define the exact year in which this particular entry was made, it is not, I fancy, beyond the legitimate bounds of critical conjecture. Helinand's system

On the first page of the Romance, Helinand read that an Angel had appeared to a certain hermit in Britain and revealed to him the history of the Holy Graal. In transferring the record of this event to his Chronicle, he was compelled by the exigencies of his system, which required the insertion of every event recorded under some particular year, to assign a date to the occurrence. A vague 'five hundred years ago' would be likely to suggest itself as an appropriate time at which the occurrence might be supposed to have taken place; and if he were writing in 1220, the revelation to the hermit would thus naturally be relegated to the year 720, the year under which the entry actually appears. This, of course, is pure guesswork, but the fact remains that the Chronicle was written in or about 1220, and the Book of the Graal not long before it.

[1] *De Mas Latrie. Trés. de Chron.*, col. 1488.

Master Blihis

The name of the author is nowhere recorded. He may possibly be referred to in the 'Elucidation' prefixed to the rhymed version of *Percival le Gallois* under the name of 'Master Blihis,' but this vague and tantalising pseudonym affords no hint of his real identity.[1] Whoever he may have been, I hope that I am not misled by a translator's natural partiality for the author he translates in assigning him a foremost rank among the masters of mediæval prose romance.

With these testimonies to its age and genuineness, I commend the Book of the Graal to all who love to read of King Arthur and his knights of the Table Round. They will find here printed in English for the first time what I take to be in all good faith the original story of Sir Perceval and the Holy Graal, whole and incorrupt as it left the hands of its first author.

SEBASTIAN EVANS.

Coombe Lea, Bickley, Kent,
January 1898.

[1] Cf. Potvin, *P. le G.* ii. 1 and 7, with vol. i. p. 131 and vol. ii. p. 112 of the present work.

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